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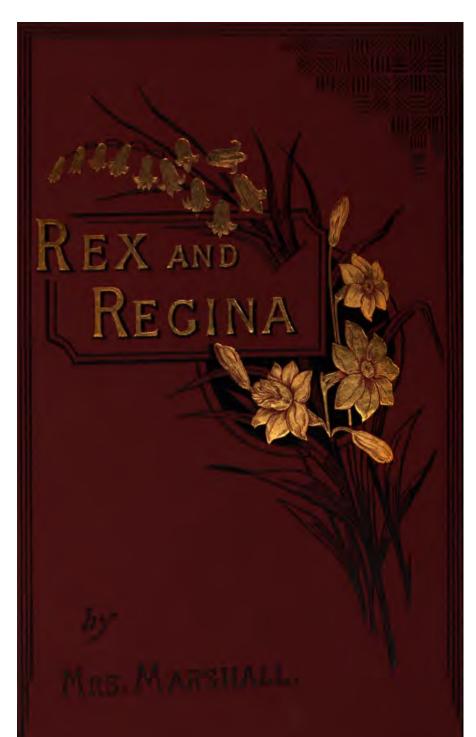
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REX AND REGINA.

Ballaniyae Press

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"Give me some of that purple flower, Rowley, please."—Page 7.

Frontispiece.

REX AND REGINA;

OR,

The Song of the River.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "RUBY AND PEARL," "HEATHER AND HAREBELL,"
"DEWDBOPS AND DIAMONDS," ETC. ETC.

"A brooklet nameless and unknown
Was I at first, resembling
A little child, that all alone
Comes venturing down the stairs of stone
Irresolute and trembling."

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

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LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXXXII.

251. g. 473.

THE CHILDREN OF THE PRESENT,

This Story,

TAKEN FROM THE LIVES

OF

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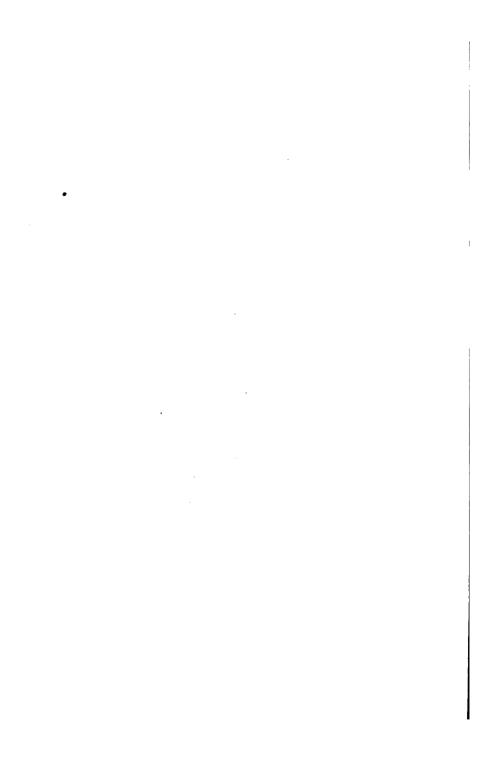
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Bedicated,

WITH LOVING WISHES,

BY

AN OLD FRIEND.



CONTENTS.

CHAI	P. `										PAGE
I.	REGINA	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	I
II.	REX	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	12
III.	ALONE		•				•				22
IV.	RESCUE			•		•	•				29
v.	DREAML	AND	•	•	,						37
VI.	AN UNW	ILLIN	ia ai	JEST					•		49
VII.	INSPECT	ON		•		• ,					56
VIII.	REPROOF	٠.		•							67
IX.	RIVER LI	FE									76
x.	AN INVI	OITA1	N								86
XI.	THE TUT	OR									95
XII.	GUESTS										102
XIII.	STRAWBI	ERRY	GAR	DENS				•			111
XIV.	A LETTE	R									122
xv.	TIM	•				•					133
XVI.	KIND DE	EDS			•		•				145
XVII.	ARITHME	TIC							•		155
xviii.	STORIES							•			164
XIX.	THE SON	of C	THE	RIVEF	t						175
XX.	PAST ANI	PRI	SEN'	т	_			_		_	182

viii

CONTENTS.

CHAP.									PAGE
XXI.	THE LAST	r eveni	1G	•	•	•	•	•	192
XXII	FIRST DA	YS AT B	ARRO	w co	OURT		•	•	203
XXIII.	FALLS .	•		•	•	•			212
XXIV.	UNDER T	HE FIRS	•	•					22 I
xxv.	COURT AN	ID COTT	AGE	•	•	•			232
XXVI.	RAINY DA	AYS .			•	•			243
xxvII.	BY THE F	IRESIDE							254
xxviii.	A VOICE	FROM TH	E CH	EST	•				262
XXIX.	A STRANG	E PROP	SAL			•		•	273
xxx.	" BREAKI	NG UP"	•	•		•			282
xxxı.	CHANGES			•					291
xxxII.	LOST .	•	• .		•			•	300
XXXIII.	THE LITT	LE NOOF	•	•					309
xxxiv.	HOW IT H	APPENE	D	•		•			317
xxxv.	RESTORED								328
xxxvi.	VANISHIN	G AWAY							337

REX AND REGINA.

CHAPTER I.

REGINA.

THERE was at first sight nothing in Regina which answered to the name. That name had been given her one day in the far past of her eleven years,—that past which was already beginning to look shadowy and dim,—though the very sound of her name recalled to her the voice and the form of him who had fondly styled her "Regina," as a proud pet name for his dearly loved and only child. I need not tell you that Regina was not absolutely her name. She had been called Richenda, a feminine of Richard, which had been her father's and her grandfather's name, and her great-grandfather's also!

"There never was a time," her nurse said, "when there was not a Richard Randall in the old city of Norminster, and Richard Randalls there would be," she said. "to the end!"

But Nurse's prophecy was not fulfilled. Regina's father died, leaving her as his only representative, when she was scarcely five years old, and she had fallen to the care of his cousin and successor in the Bank, who took her, as he took the spacious old town-house, with its pictures and other valuables, and was, in fact, her sole guardian and trustee for her fortune. Regina could not remember her mother at all, but she clung the more persistently to the shadowy image of her father, and she would never pass his portrait, a large oil-painting hanging in the spacious hall, without looking up at it, and saying often to herself softly, "Father!" and then more softly still, "Regina! he called me Regina!"

I do not know if you were ever inside a house like the Bank-house at Norminster, so I will try to tell you what it was like.

It was in the heart of the quiet city, but stood in a square, which it had all to itself. The open space in front of it was called "Bank Plain." To the right, just where two streets met at right angles, was the Church of Saint Michael. From her nursery window Regina looked across to this church, the tower of which was low and broad, and fixed in it was a big round clock, with very large gilt figures,

and a very rosy cherub's face peeping over it. The Bank-house was a solid square block of red brick, edged with white at the corners. There was a walled-in garden and a greenhouse, and stables just across the road at the back. From the back windows of the Bank the old castle was visible, once a grev Norman castle, now, in Regina's childhood, a modern imitation of the original building, and used as the The Bank-house itself was very county prison. spacious. The staircase was wide, and with such low steps that people with long legs always went up two or three at a time. One of Regina's earliest remembrances was stepping down these stairs holding her father's hand, and admiring as she did so a pair of blue shoes, with straps fastened by pearl buttons, and rosettes with a pearl button in the centre of each.

The days of coming down the great wide staircase were over now for Regina. Her cousin and his wife were extremely neat and precise in all their ways. No children's feet ever trod those white-painted stairs except on state occasions. Regina always went to her nursery and schoolroom by the backstairs. No great hardship, for they were far wider and better than many front staircases in smaller houses.

The "Bank-parlour" was to the right of the great hall, a mystic chamber, where Regina had seldom entered now. In earlier times she had often taken her doll and book there, and toasted her feet before the huge fireplace, when her father was in his room after the labours of the day were over. Beyond the Bank-parlour were rooms for the other partners, and a huge circular window with many small panes looked out on Bank Plain.

But all this part of the house was unknown to Regina, and the swing-doors covered with green baize shut her out from it as completely as if it had been in another county.

Regina had a daily governess, and lived very much in her own quarters up the backstairs I have mentioned.

When Miss Baker left the schoolroom after tea, Nurse resumed her charge of Regina, and Mrs. Turnbull, her cousin, was quite content that it should be so. Mrs. Turnbull was a lady much occupied with all kinds of charitable matters—societies, and working parties, and clothing clubs; so the little quiet, silent girl led her own quiet life, and lived very much apart from all those pleasures and interests which little girls now-a-days consider as necessary to their enjoyment and happiness.

Regina had one very dear friend, her white Maltese dog, Puck. I do not think he was a dog of intellect or reflection, but he was a dog capable of firm attachment, and his devotion to his mistress was unbounded. Indeed she was his world, and he was never absent

5

from her for a moment if he could help it. Puck had been at first a source of great anxiety and trouble to He had been given to her by her his little mistress. father not long before he died, and Mrs. Turnbull at first flatly refused to include him in the arrangements. Dogs were one of Mrs. Turnbull's pet aversions. They were dangerous, they were ruinous to furniture, they were ill-tempered, and noisy, and uncleanly. In fact, there was no bad quality which Mrs. Turnbull did not impute to dogs in general and to Puck in particular. It was, indeed, the old story of "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him!" That is, he is so utterly bad by repute that he might as well be utterly bad as a matter of fact, and the only course left is to hang him! Mrs. Turnbull's animosity for Puck was decidedly returned with interest. He, the best-tempered of fluffy white dogs, growled at her approach, barked furiously when she entered the' room, where he was monarch of all he surveyed, and, more than all, once pursued her into her own territory, and left the mark of very dirty little paws across the spotless purity of the white stone hall.

Puck's fate would have been sealed then and there, had not Mr. Turnbull, coming out of the Bank, interceded for him, moved to pity by Regina's face of speechless woe. But an arrangement was entered into to keep the peace, from this day forward, by Regina promising never on any pretence to allow

Puck to pass the charmed barrier between the backstairs and the hall, and to become security for his good behaviour in other respects.

Every week Puck was washed in the nursery, dried before the fire, and combed. He was then worthy to be compared with any fluffy white dog in the toyshop, and would stand on his hind-legs for an indefinite time to be admired, while a piece of blue ribbon, bought with his mistress's slender stock of pocket-money, was tied round his neck. Puck could "trust" in the most approved way; he would sit with Nurse's spectacles on his nose and a paper cap on his head for full five minutes, and Nurse would, though trembling for the safety of her "glasses," say—

"There, there, Miss Regina, my dear; you and the dog might go about for a show and make a fortune, if there was not one made already for you."

One hot June day Regina and Puck were seated in the little square garden, which was only a grass plot surrounded by walls, on the east side of the house. They were enjoying the cool shade which was cast in a deep black-blue shadow across it. The city sparrows were twittering and chirping in the dark ivy which covered one side of the wall. Above was a serene summer sky, which hung a canopy of unbroken deep blue over the roofs and streets of the city. The greenhouse, or, as we should

say now, conservatory, was built on the south side of the house, and I need not say was, like the white hall, the staircase, and the large holland-covered drawingroom, almost forbidden ground to Regina and Puck.

In her father's lifetime she remembered going the rounds in the "houses" with a basket to take up the withered leaves or blossoms which he clipped off with garden-scissors. She remembered also that he would often cut some lovely flower for her, and fasten it under the ribbon which bound back her hair, and would tell her the names of the flowers and plants, and show with pride those which had taken prizes at the Norminster Horticultural Show.

"How very long ago that seemed now," Regina thought, as, touched by some hidden spring of remembrance, she left her seat to meet the gardener, old Rowley, who had kept the greenhouses and the gardens for many years.

"Good morning, Missie! Here's flowers for you! Why, that pink azalea is the finest bloom I've seen this year. The gardener at Squire Lushington's was that astonished he could hardly speak. Says he, 'You must be up to some tricks, to get them flowers in your city greenhouse.' No, said I; it's not tricks—it's care that does it."

"Give me some of that purple flower, Rowley, please. I remember my father twisted some of it round my hat a long time ago."

"Aye, surely, what a memory you have, Miss Rigeena! I mind the day well enough. The master was that proud of you. Well, well—yes,—take that bit, and welcome; it's the finest-coloured clematis I ever saw."

Regina took the flowers and twisted them round her very wide coarse straw hat, and then turned up the path and crossed a second square of grass to the garden beyond, which was shut off by close iron railings. The greenhouses were there, and Regina did not often venture within the railings. Indeed. the gate was generally locked; but she knew it would be open now, as Rowley had so lately come through it. The purple clematis had awoke longslumbering thoughts of the past. Her lonely childhood, which was almost entirely spent without companions of her own age, had deepened her naturally imaginative temper. I mean that Regina lived in a world of her own, peopled it with friends who had no existence except in her own brain; she talked to them, followed them in their everyday life, knew in what houses they lived, as she took her daily walk with Miss Baker, and entered into their plays, their lessons, their joys, and their sorrows. Indeed, Regina at eleven years old lived two lives—the one of dreams, the other that of a quiet little girl, who learned her lessons, wrote copies and dictation, studied French under Monsieur de Vallerie, drew

from stiff copies, cottages with overhanging roofs and a chimney at the side, and went through a number of exercises and scales on the upright piano in the schoolroom, Miss Baker sitting by and counting time in a faint, weary voice, as the little fingers went through the appointed routine.

"Music!" Regina would sometimes say to herself or to one of her unseen friends,—"Music! I can't think how all this misery can be music; but I suppose it will 'lead up to it,' as Miss Baker says."

This June day was Saturday and a half-holiday. Regina rather enjoyed the freedom from schoolroom work; and, moreover, she often had a walk with Nurse on Saturday afternoons down through the close, past the stately cathedral, and then to the gate-house, where a broad-bottomed boat was moored; and at the sound of feet passing under the low archway a boy would come out of the cottage, unfasten the chain from a post, fling it into the boat with a clanging sound, and then push the unwieldy craft across to the other side with a long pole.

Sometimes a big wherry with brown sails stopped the passage, or several barges with men walking up and down with their poles, pushing one way and resting the other, as they propelled the barge along the dun-coloured waters. Regina was always glad when a barge with a family passed—the little ragged, squalid children, the women with red and yellow handkerchiefs tied under their chin, the babies, who Nurse said were "dragged up nohow."

This river-life possessed a great attraction for Regina, and she would often think of it when lying awake at night, or dreaming her day-dreams in the garden, or walking silently by Miss Baker's side, up the river to Norminster, down the river to Normouth, and back again.

The poor little babies would grow to children, and the children into men and women, to be, in their turn, bargemen with long poles, their wives sitting with folded arms in a sort of stolid indifference, disturbed only by clutching at a child who rolled or toddled too near the edge of the barge.

On Saturday afternoons Regina generally persuaded Nurse to go over the ferry and walk by the river as far as Barrow Bridge.

Barrow was a suburb of Norminster lying by the river-side, with the walls of its old ruined monastery, now used as a dyeing-house, casting dark shadows on the sluggish river, and a number of red brick houses standing back, their gardens sloping down to the water's edge, and boathouses to each, where pleasure yachts were moored.

This fine Saturday afternoon would be the very time to go to Barrow, and Regina summoned her unseen friends to go with her, and was so completely lost to the actual in the imaginary, that Puck's whine and low growl was the first thing that recalled her to the reality of her cousin's presence in the greenhouse.

"Regina! Richenda!" Her cousin always called her Richenda when she wished to impress her very forcibly with any subject. "Richenda!"

Poor little Regina awoke from her dream with a rosy flush of colour on her face, and she was running away with Puck at her heels, caught, as they were, on the forbidden ground, when she became conscious that Mrs. Turnbull was not alone; indeed, she was surrounded by a large party. Regina was much too shy to look twice at them, but she had a dim notion that the party consisted of a tall lady and a boy and two girls, all dressed neatly and prettily, while she—she knew she was untidy, and that there was nothing pretty about her but the purple flowers in her brown hat.

"Poor child!" she heard Mrs. Turnbull say as she ran away; "she is terribly shy."

CHAPTER II.

REX.

An hour later and a carriage was rolling away from the Bank-house with the lady and the three children whose presence in the greenhouse had so struck such terror into Regina's heart.

- "Mother," began Bertha, "did you ever see such a little plain, old-fashioned child as Mrs. Turnbull's niece?"
- "Not her niece—her cousin," said Agnes. "Yes, her frock fastened behind with great hooks, and her hat so awfully bent, with all those ragged leaves in it!"
- "A perfect little guy," said Bertha. "Did you not think so, mother?"
- "I did not," said the boy of eleven years old, who had not spoken before. "I didn't think her a guy. She was very pretty, I can tell you."
- "Little boys have no taste," said Agnes, "and no one cares what they say. But she is awfully rich, is she not, mother?"
 - "That word again, Agnes! Do, pray, use it in its

REX. 13

right place. Yes, little Richenda Randall is, or will be, very rich—that is, she will have a great deal of money, as her father's heiress, in the Bank."

"It is a pity she was not a boy and called Richard, instead of that ugly name," said Bertha.

"She is called Regina," said Reginald; "I heard that before I saw her. Perhaps you don't know what Regina means."

"Perhaps not, nor Rex neither," was Bertha's reply. "Do keep your feet away from mine, Rex, you kick aw—, I mean dreadfully."

"Why are you so silent, mother?" asked Agnes.
"What are you thinking of?"

"Of old times, dear," was the reply. "Richenda's mother was a cousin of mine and a dear friend. I cannot help thinking of her as she was when I last saw her, the most beautiful and attractive girl."

"Then she must have been different to Regina; perhaps she was like a queen."

Lady Stuart laughed. "Names do not always go with their meaning. I have known Blanches as dark as Indians, and Olives as fair as lilies."

"And now here is a Regina looking like a little nursemaid—just like Nurse's niece in her dress."

"For shame, Bertha; you are so spiteful. I think that child is somehow queenlike. Such a little, slender throat and head, so—well," said poor Reginald, much at a loss in his description,—"well,

there is a look about her like a queen. I don't care how you laugh at me."

Rex's face grew very red, and his mother hastened to talk of the past to relieve him from his confusion.

She was not these children's own mother, but no one could have guessed it. She was so affectionate, so wise, so tender, that her own little ones, who were stationed in the deep, cushioned window-ledge of the nursery at Barrow Court watching for her return, never knew that the two sisters and the brother Reginald, whose devotion to them was so great, had had a different mother.

Reginald had, from the moment of his new mother's return from India with these babies, constituted himself their lawful protector.

Sir Montague Stuart was still serving out his time as a judge in India, and had returned only for six months to bring home the children's new mother and the two babies, Blanche and Bernard, two little fat, rosy creatures, who set all notions of pale-faced, thin Indian children at defiance, and were more like two round balls than anything else. Blanche and Bernard, or Bunchie and Berry, as they were commonly called, had been pressing their noses against the window of the nursery at Barrow for fully ten minutes, watching for the return of the carriage.

During this ten minutes Bunchie had rolled off the window seat twice, and Berry three times. But they had a faculty of picking themselves up in a wonderful way, and *never* apparently being the worse for their tumbles.

They were just three years old. Bunchie could talk as plainly as any grown-up person; she could repeat rhymes without end—all those nursery rhymes called "original poems," which were then so much on the lips of the children, and which have now been put into the background by the rhymes of a more advanced school.

I confess I hold to the old verses, as to many old things which the tide of fashion has swept away, and do not think the new are better. Berry was fat and meditative; his words were few; his large blue eyes were dreamy, and he had altogether so grave an aspect that Reginald called him the Little Judge. Berry had a good deal to put up with from Bunchie. She was his queen, and governed him with a somewhat stiff rule. But Berry's quiet goodnature was seldom ruffled. Big tears would at times roll down his fat cheeks, but he speedily recovered himself, and seldom indulged in what is called by nurses "a roar." He left that to Bunchie, who could, on occasion, lift up her small voice in anything but dulcet strains.

That pleasant nursery at Barrow Court had two windows, one where on this particular day the children were stationed, and which overlooked the carriage drive; the other at the side of the house. from which the river was seen between the trees. and sails of the wherries, with the occasional flash of the oars of an outrigger in summer evenings. beyond lay the roofs of the village of Barrow, and beyond that the tall spire of the cathedral of Norminster pointed to the sky. It was a pleasant view: and though in these flat eastern counties hills are unknown, there was undulating ground crowned here and there with fir plantations, and one higher than the rest was dignified by the name of Mount -Mount Michael. This was a favourite resort of the Norminster people on holidays, and a white house stood on the top amongst the trees, where tea and strawberries, ham and fresh eggs, were provided at a small cost.

The little Stuarts were newcomers to Barrow Court. Though it was their father's property, it had been little used for some years. Their father's profession took him to India when very young, and after their grandfather's death the house was shut up. It was not a particularly pretty house. Built of red brick, like so many in the neighbourhood, and showing a great many windows, with white painted wooden sills and borders; and in the middle of the front of the house was a large and imposing portico, supported by pillars of white painted wood, and within its shadow was the hall door, rather too narrow for its

REX. 17

surroundings, and furnished with a very large knocker of shining brass, and bell-handles and other handles to match. This knocker was so far above the reach of ordinary people that it was rarely used, and would have felt itself neglected had not the housemaid reached it by a pair of steps once a week, and scrubbed and polished the lion's face till she could see her own in it, and twisted the heavy ring round and round which the lion held between his jaws.

"Here they come! here's the carriage, and I see Rex—Rex." exclaimed Blanche.

"I see Rex," echoed Berry, in less excited tones; and a voice from the window on the side of the nursery was heard—

"Well, you need not make so much row about it, need you?"

The words were followed by a yawn and a sigh; and as the twins were toddling off to the door, it was opened, and in came Rex himself.

Then there were such jumpings and confused shouts, and cries of "What's you brought us, Rex?" and fumbling in the boy's pockets; and at last two balls, one blue and the other red, were turned out.

"It's not the ball in the cage," said Blanche, disappointed.

"No, I hadn't money enough, Miss Bunchie. I

В



got these two for half what the other cost. Two balls are better than one. So we think, don't we, Berry?"

"I liked the ball in the net-cage," said Bunchie persistently, "'cause it's so pretty."

By a ball in a cage Blanche meant an india-rubber ball enclosed in a netted bag of many colours. Such balls were common in the days when Blanche and Berry were children. They have long since been superseded, and even now I can hardly tell you the object of the netted bag, unless it was to protect the inflated ball from injury. The two little hard balls were quite to Berry's taste, and he was perfectly contented. He always was contented.

Reginald now went to the window in the corner, where another occupant of that pleasant nursery lay. He was the third of Sir Montague Stuart's eldest children, and the one who needed all the forbearance and love which his new mother could show him. Poor Hamish Stuart had spent the greater part of his short life on a sofa. After his father's return to India, where the children's mother died, Hamish had been sent to a lady who lived near the sea, as it was hoped sea-air would restore him to some measure of health. This lady looked on Hamish as a patient, and did her duty by him, but she had never drawn out his love by sympathy, nor attempted

to sweeten the bitter cross of personal affliction which lay upon the boy.

When Lady Stuart came to take possession of Barrow Court with her twins, there was a general gathering-in of the stray children.

Bertha and Agnes and Reginald had been living with a lady in Cheltenham, who had taught them, with the help of a governess, with her own girls and boys, but had not "mothered" them. Bertha and Agnes at thirteen and fourteen were very independent and "grown-up" for their age, while Reginald was very young for his eleven years. Hamish was twelve, but so small and shrunk was his figure, that he might have been counted as scarcely more than seven. He was not winning and attractive, poor boy; his mouth had a drawn, pitiful expression, and he rather set himself against his new mother, and grumbled a good deal at leaving the sea, though when he was at Brighton he had grumbled quite as much at being condemned to live near it. At first the sight of his strong, vigorous young brother, with his abounding health and power of movement, was anything but a pleasure. He held out against Rex to the last, but who could resist Rex?

Unselfish and affectionate, merry and laughterloving, he was like sunshine everywhere. He was not particularly bright at his books; indeed, Agnes called him a dunce, and Bertha was always drawing got these tv balls are bet Berry?"

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REX. 19

to sweeten the bitter cross of personal affliction which lay upon the boy.

When Lady Stuart came to take possession of Barrow Court with her twins, there was a general gathering-in of the stray children.

Bertha and Agnes and Reginald had been living with a lady in Cheltenham, who had taught them, with the help of a governess, with her own girls and boys, but had not "mothered" them. Bertha and Agnes at thirteen and fourteen were very independent and "grown-up" for their age, while Reginald was very young for his eleven years. Hamish was twelve, but so small and shrunk was his figure, that he might have been counted as scarcely more than seven. He was not winning and attractive, poor boy: his mouth had a drawn, pitiful expression, and he rather set himself against his new mother, and grumbled a good deal at leaving the sea, though when he was at Brighton he had grumbled quite as much at being condemned to live near it. At first the sight of his strong, vigorous young brother, with his abounding health and power of movement, was anything but a pleasure. He held out against Rex to the last, but who could resist Rex?

Unselfish and affectionate, merry and laughterloving, he was like sunshine everywhere. He was not particularly bright at his books; indeed, Agnes called him a dunce, and Bertha was always drawing comparisons between him and Ronald Smith, one of their companions in their temporary home at Cheltenham.

But Rex had plenty of excellent sense; he was keen in the study of birds and butterflies, and had a tender compassion in him for all things, both great and small, which we generally see in boys who have noble natures united with great physical force.

This tenderness was seen in every look and gesture when he was with his brother Hamish. While Bertha and Agnes complained of his being cross and sulky, and Mrs. Bryce, the nurse, said, "Master Hamish wore out her patience" while most people pitied him and few really cared to be with him, Rex would give up games and outdoor amusements many a time to stay in the nursery and be ready if wanted, though never forcing himself upon the poor fractious boy, and patiently bearing snubs and ill-temper of which others bitterly complained.

There are few boys and girls of whom it may be said we have to put on, as it were, spectacles to look for their faults—so few that we can count them easily on our fingers. If Rex had faults, they were seldom apparent. A certain easy-going carelessness was one, and too great an indifference as to his lessons another. He was dull at Latin and Greek, and did not make an effort perhaps as some boys do to make up by dogged perseverance

REX. 2I

what was lacking in ability. He was rather given to lie in bed too late in the morning, and to turn round and go to sleep after he had been called.

But as this story goes on you will know Rex as well as I knew him, and therefore I will not write any more descriptions, which are at the best rather dull, however true they may be.

CHAPTER III.

ALONE

"WE have been to the Bank, Hamish," Rex said, as he sat down on a low straw chair by his brother's sofa.

"Keep these children quiet," was the reply.
"Nurse has left them here ever so long, and they have done nothing but squall and shout."

Rex took no notice of this, but went on-

"We went to the Bank-house, and Mrs. Turnbull made us stay to luncheon. It was not a very swell one, as she did not expect us. We saw Richenda, or Regina, as she is called. You know who I mean—the girl Nurse was talking about. She has the biggest eyes I ever saw and is very tall. Mother asked her to come out here next week—then you will see her."

"I'm sure I shan't. I don't want girls prying here."

"It is odd," said Rex, taking no notice of this,

"that she should be called Regina and that I am called Rex."

- "Very!" said Hamish, drily.
- "She sat as mute as a mouse at dinner."
- "I thought mice squeaked," interrupted Hamish.

Rex did not lose patience, but tried hard to interest his brother in his morning's adventures.

- "What shall we do this afternoon, Rex?" asked Bertha, coming into the nursery with a great rush. "Will you come to the wood and boil a kettle for tea and tie up the hammock?"
- "Yes, I don't mind," said Rex, jumping up, "if mother says we may."
- "Oh, that's all right! Agnes is gone to pack a basket, with some bread-and-butter and cake."

Bunchie and Berry, who had been bustled off into the night nursery to be dressed to go out, now reappeared in large white linen sun-hats and holland dresses.

Bunchie was beginning to explain that she too was going to have tea in the woods, when she was cut short in the middle of a sentence by Nurse snatching her up and bearing her off to play under the shade of a great cedar-tree at the side of the house, but not to tea in the woods.

"Come along, Rex," Bertha said; "what are you waiting for?"

But Rex lingered.

"Would you like me to stay and read 'Masterman Ready,' Hamish?" he asked.

Hamish did not turn his head, but said in a low tone, "No, thank you."

Rex still hesitated, he thought he saw something very like a tear on Hamish's long lashes; but Agnes's voice was heard calling him, and he slowly left the room.

Then Hamish was alone and all was quiet. He covered his face with his thin fingers, and more than one tear trickled through them.

The clock over the chimney-piece ticked its monotonous tick-tick. The canary in the cage above his head sent out its little burst of song as the sun, now nearing the west, tinged its yellow wings with gold.

There were sounds of quick footsteps on the terrace below, and voices growing fainter in the distance—the children's voices on their way to the wood for their afternoon tea.

The river wound its sluggish way not many hundred yards from the gates, and every now and then the "Yo-ho" of the bargemen came on the breath of the summer wind. Poor Hamish counted up his grievances as he lay alone, and they were a long list.

"It is all very fine for them to run off singing and whistling and I left here; the pain horribly bad to-day, too. I would rather be at Brighton ALONE. 25

after all, for there I could see the waves breaking and the people passing up and down the esplanade. What was the use of my coming home, and her pretending she was going to be so kind to me? Kind! she has not been near me to-day, at least not since breakfast. Then there are these two girls, Bertha and Agnes; I do almost hate them, I believe—stuck up and dressed up. And then there is Reginald, or Rex, as he likes to be called. His caring for me is all pretence. And why should he, or anybody, care for me, a wretched cripple with hip-disease, and—and "——

Sobs choked him as he went over all this, and then he lay still in a sort of hard, unrestful quiet, which was even worse than complaints.

Presently the door behind him opened softly and some one came in.

"My dear Hamish, are you quite alone?"

There was no answer, but a cool, soft hand was laid on his forehead, and Lady Stuart sat down by him.

"I have had such a bad headache, brought on, I think, by driving into Norminster in the heat of the day, or I should have come to you before. I had business at the Bank, and when Mr. Turnbull found out who I was—a cousin of his little ward's mother—he took me in to see Mrs. Turnbull, and made me send for the children out of the carriage."

Lady Stuart laid her heavy aching head on the

pillow by Hamish and asked, "Are you in great pain to-day, darling?"

- " Yes!"
- "I am so sorry. Did you think I had forgotten you?"
 - "Yes; but never mind."
- "The heat is trying to us who are well; I am sure it must be to you who are ill. I don't think I ever felt the sun beat down more fiercely in India. I do not remember ever to have had a worse head-ache there."

Hamish felt self-reproached, but he was silent.

- "I have heard, I think, of the right person to come here three times a week to teach you and Rex Latin, and Greek, and arithmetic; and if he only turns out to be as nice as Mr. Turnbull assures me he is, I shall let your sisters take lessons also, and the rest I can do myself. I shall prefer it to having a governess always in the house."
 - "I hope this person is not a woman."
- "No; very much a man," Lady Stuart said, laughing. "Did I not say he?"
- "He will soon give me up," said Hamish. "No one can put up with me long. Even you"——
 - "O Hamish!"
- "Yes, you do put up with me, I know; but you know I am cross and disagreeable, and do nothing but grumble."

ALONE.

"I know, dear, that you have much to suffer, and that it must be very hard."

"Ah, isn't it?" exclaimed Hamish, seizing her hand and squeezing it tight. "And what good am I to anybody? They all call me 'poor;' even my father used to look down on me at Brighton and say, 'Poor.' Well he might; it must be a humiliation to him to have me for his eldest son."

"Hamish, do you ever think of these words, 'Perfect through suffering'? Do you ever think what the pain is meant to do for you and for us who watch it with such sadness, and would gladly take it from you if we could? Do you never think of the One who showed His sinless perfection and patience in suffering, so that all the world might know it, and bear pain nobly for His sake?"

"I try sometimes to think of Him," poor Hamish said faltering, "but I can't—I can't."

Lady Stuart was now called away to see a visitor, and Hamish again thought himself alone, but to his surprise Rex took the place his mother had left vacant, a leaf of wild strawberries in his hand.

"Are they not pretty, Hamish? Do eat them, though I know they look nicer than they taste; do eat them. Stop! I'll get a saucer and some milk out of the cupboard, and we'll grind some sugar."

All this took some time, especially the slow pro-

cess of making a shower of fine sugar by rubbing two lumps together.

Hamish allowed the strawberries were very good, and then Rex got "Masterman Ready" and began to read.

"I say, don't you want to go back to the others, Rex?" Hamish said.

"No; I'd rather stay, if you don't mind," was the reply; "it is so cool and pleasant here."

Rex had just hung up the hammock for his sisters, and had some longings for a swing in it himself after he had picked the sticks and boiled the kettle. But Bertha and Agnes had agreed that each were to have half-an-hour, and Hamish would be sure to be wanting to be read to, as Lady Stuart had a headache. So Rex put self, as usual, out of the question, and secured a leaf full of strawberries, and ran back to the house with them.

Rex will have his reward; there is a harvest for the unselfish ones to reap which has a sweetness all its own.

Bertha and Agnes, hotly contesting the precise time in which Bertha had occupied the hammock, showed evident signs of disapproval when Nurse and Ella, her niece, the nursemaid to whom Bertha had compared Regina, came toiling up the road with Bunchie and Berry. Were they as happy as Rex, who had given up his afternoon to his lame brother? I leave you to answer the question.

CHAPTER IV.

RESCUE.

THERE is a life going on every day in our rivers and canals which we think very little about; perhaps more now than we did in the time of Regina's childhood; but still, when we speak of poor miserable ragged children, untaught and uncared for, we picture them in dark cellars or cold attics, where rain and snow and bitter wind penetrate in winter, and the heat is all but suffocating in summer; or we picture a number of bare-footed badly clothed little ones playing before a mud house, where, in a few square feet, father, mother, and children are packed together. But I do not think we realise the life of the children who spend their infancy and childhood in the silent highways of our rivers and canals, on board barges or "wherries," as we say in the eastern counties, and know no other home.

These barges carry coals or potatoes and a variety of cargoes from the mouth of rivers from ships to the nearest large towns or cities. The city of Norminster lies between twenty and thirty miles from the port of Normouth, and this short passage was traversed by the barges continually, backwards and forwards, with a sleepy monotonous regularity which knew no respite and no variety.

Some of the barges were the property of the bargemen. Some were let out for a term to men who worked them for so much a week on the profits of the cargoes.

One of these barges, the "Sarah Anne," had belonged for some years to a man called Luke Jones, who had himself been born on it, had lived there as man and boy; and when his father died of overdrinking, while comparatively young, he left the barge and all it contained to his son, who had known no other home, and was well content that it should be so.

The "Sarah Anne" was an ordinary-sized barge, with its close stuffy cabin, with windows not much bigger than those of a doll's house, and a chimney which was merely a tin tube, from which puffs of smoke curled out when cooking or washing was going on below.

The roof of the cabin was a favourite seat of Luke Jones's little boy, who, like his father and grandfather before him, believed in the "Sarah Anne" as his world, and did not care to exchange it for any other. He was a curious little figure of a boy, in trousers very much too short and very much too





"When he took up his position on the roof of the cabin, he always sat cross-legged, after the fashion of Turks or tailors."—Page 31.

RESCUE.

31

wide. They had, indeed, been his father's, and without much trouble they had been shortened for his small son with a pair of shears. A jersey full of holes, through which little Tim's white skin appeared in various places, completed his attire. There was nothing under or above these articles. A mass of tangled curly hair, burned brown and yellow by exposure, hung over the child's forehead, and a pair of twinkling eyes looked out from under it, very much as Puck's did from his fluff of white hair. The boy had no shoes or stockings; he did not need them; his naked feet were well used to trudging on the narrow boards of the barge, and when he took up his position on the roof of the cabin, he always sat crossed-legged after the fashion of Turks or tailors.

On this hot June day—it was a week after the one when Regina had been startled by the arrival of the party in Mr. Turnbull's greenhouse—Tim was squatted in the position I describe. If you ask me what he was doing, I must say, nothing. If you ask me what he was thinking about, I am almost inclined to say nothing, only that is an impossible state of things. Of something we do all think, and in a dreamy confused way Tim was thinking of the water-rats, which now and then popped their heads out amongst the sedges on the bank, and then disappeared under the water again.

He was thinking in a still more dreamy and confused way of his father, who, with a short pipe in his mouth, was sitting with his back to his little son at the prow of the barge. The barge was drifting empty down stream to Normouth, and an occasional push with the long pole was enough to propel it seawards. It was a very different matter when the barge was loaded and the tide against it; then Luke Jones had to push at times till he was purple in the face; and his mate, a young man named Amos who was paid for his work, used to say that "the guv'nor was getting past the labour, and had better give it up before he split hisself in two."

Tim was, as I said, thinking of his father and the rats in turn, and wondering, if he really did split himself, whether he would die; and if he died, where should he go. He was too small to push the poles, and much too small to carry the heavy loads over the planks at the landing-places, as his father and Amos did, to or from the carts and waggons waiting to receive them.

Tim was equal to a few cooking labours; he peeled potatoes and broiled red herrings, and could fry an egg at a pinch; but he was not big enough or strong enough to take as yet any part in the actual work of the barge; and supposing he was left alone in the world, what should he do?

"Tim!"

His father called him without turning his head.

"Tim, I say!" and then followed some words I cannot write here, for poor Tim rarely heard his father speak without an oath.

Tim uncurled himself from his perch, swung down from the roof of the cabin, and pattered along the narrow deck to his father's side.

Luke did not turn his head even now, but said—

"Is there aught for supper?"

"There's two bloaters, and a bit of cheese, and an inion!"

"Is the rum out?"

"There ain't a drop left that I knows on."

"Ah!" and Luke whiffed a column of smoke from his half-closed lips. "Ah! Amos has been a helping himself. Thought so!"

"I don't know. I didn't peach on him. Don't tell Amos"——

"Get out!" was his father's rough reply; and then he turned and struck his little boy with his huge arm a blow which sent him rolling over the edge of the barge into the river.

There is scarcely a bargeman who can swim. Luke caught the pole and watched to see the child rise to the surface, holding the pole out towards him, and calling for help to some men in a boat rowing against the tide towards the "Sarah Anne."

But the boat was some yards off, and little Tim sank again, his father shouting and stooping down from the side of the barge with the pole, and calling almost savagely for help. It came, not from the men in the boat, nor from two men who were hastening to the spot from the field, but from a boy, a child scarcely older than Tim, but oh! how much stronger and bigger!

Rex Stuart had thrown down his fishing-rod, torn off his jacket, and plunged into the river. He had learned to swim by his father's orders as soon as he could do anything; for Sir Montague Stuart had lost a brother in the days of his childhood. He was unable to swim, and saw him sink before his eyes. He had never forgotten this, and Rex was, therefore, long before he was eleven years The river was not old, at home in the water. broad, and he had soon reached the spot where poor Tim had gone down. He watched with his eyes fixed on the spot, and once more the little brown head appeared. Rex seized the child by the hair and made for the shore, where the men stood, and pulled him and the half-drowned Tim up the bank.

There were great shouts from the few spectators—shouts of applause which a brave act always wins—while the "Sarah Anne" was brought-to by throwing out a small grappling-iron, and Luke Jones, pale and trembling, swung himself down the side of

35

the low craft, and half wading, half walking through the rushes, reached the spot where Tim lay.

"He ain't dead, he ain't dead; doan't ye say it, doan't ye say it, for I did it. Tim! Tim! my poor Jenny's little Tim!"

"He is coming to fast enough," said a rough-toned voice, "no fear; but it was all along of this young gent's bravery."

"Yes, that's true," said another. "Haven't you got nothing to say to the young gent?"

Rex had been kneeling by Tim's side watching him with keen interest, and when at last he gave a great sob and opened his eyes, he looked up and said—

"I don't want any thanks, but he ought to be rolled up in blankets or something, and kept warm; he is shuddering and trembling with cold."

"Blankets!" said a bystander, "he ain't ever been betwixt blankets in the 'Sarah Anne.'"

"Why, he has got a bed, hasn't he?" said Rex.
"He ought to be put to bed."

"A bed! Well, a sort of a one—something between a shelf and a cupboard. Come, young un, wake up! You dare lay a finger on my boy," said Luke.

"Come, don't you pretend to be the good father; that's rather too strong," was the reply.

"Let me take him to our gardener's cottage," said Rex; "it is just across the road. I'll carry him." "You'd better run home and dry yourself, young master. The child will soon come right with a glass of grog."

"You leave him alone," said Luke Jones; "I'll look arter him now; he's my son," he said fiercely.

"That's gratitude, surely! that's gratitude! But it's no odds to the likes of you, Luke Jones, whether your child lives or dies; we all know that."

A great flood of bad words was poured forth, when through the little knot of bystanders came a white fluffy dog, anxious to discover what had happened, and a voice was heard calling—

"Puck, Puck! come back, Puck!"

CHAPTER V.

DREAMLAND.

THE walk by the river-side on Saturday afternoons was one of Regina's chief pleasures. Walks with Miss Baker round the Cathedral Close or the Castle Hill were dull and uninteresting.

Miss Baker had lost the spring of youth, and was one of those good people who do their duty rigidly, and throw over it no mantle of pleasure for themselves or others. Her life had been a sad one, full of disappointment and loss, and from this very cause she was not the most suitable person to be Regina's sole companion, teacher, and friend. While Regina walked by her side holding converse with her imaginary friends, Miss Baker held converse with her past—bright days of youth, happiness, and home affection, all gone now. Only the small lodging in Cross Street as a home; only the daily routine at the Bank-house to earn her daily bread.

But it was wholly different with Nurse. She had a real, loving interest in Regina. She had known

her father and mother, had lived long in their service, and watched Regina grow from babyhood to this hour. Nurse knew well enough that the life the lonely child led was by no means wholesome for her. She knew she wanted better companions than Puck, and wanted to be roused from dreams to reality.

This Saturday-afternoon walk by the river-side was always looked forward to by both Nurse and Regina, and the good woman did her best to excite the child into races with Puck, gathering the flowers by the river, and other child-like enjoyments.

On this particular Saturday, Nurse found it more than usually difficult to rouse Regina, and at last she exclaimed, "Ah! my dear Miss Regina, you will have to go to school. You want waking up, my dear. You are too old and quiet for your age. I have no notion, for my part, how it is Mrs. Turnbull can leave you alone as she does."

"But, Nurse, I am glad she does leave me alone. The most miserable thing in the world is to go for a drive in the carriage. I hate it."

"That may be, my dear. You don't like it, and you ought to. It's not natural; and you seem to me to be always sitting writing, or think, thinking, from one week's end to another. Why, only this morning, when I was looking after Ella as she was cleaning out the nursery, I came upon these," and Nurse

drew from her pocket a quantity of ruled paper, all written over, and with curious drawings of men and women and birds and dogs all round.

"Nurse," exclaimed Regina, "give it to me this minute." Then drawing herself up, with the arch of her slender throat and quiet dignity, which made Reginald say, "She did look like a queen somehow," she said, "You must not read my manuscripts, Nurse."

"Your manyscripts, or whatever you call them, my dear, ought to be all thrown in the fire. It is wasting your brains and making you thin and pale, instead of round and rosy. You talk to yourself; I hear you often; and when you ain't talking you are writing. It's all for your good I say this, my precious," said poor Nurse, melting into tenderness. "It's not for me to interfere with my betters, but I was very near taking this here manyscript to Mrs. Turnbull and saying, 'You are my young lady's guardian, ma'am. She ought to go to school, or have companions of her own age, or "——

"Nurse," exclaimed Regina, with a vehemence which would have astonished Miss Baker or Mrs. Turnbull or M. de Vallerie—"Nurse, promise you will not touch my—my histories. They are only histories of my friends the Evans, and the Grants, and the little Jacksons."

"Little fiddlesticks!" said Nurse. "There's no

such people, and you'll get moping mad if you live amongst them."

"You don't understand, Nurse; you can't understand. I tell my stories and then I write them, and draw the pictures round the paper. It is my way of being happy. Don't grudge it to me, Nurse. Puck knows all about them, and understands quite well, and—and—. Oh, pray, dear Nurse, don't tell any one." Then snatching the crumpled paper from Nurse's hand, she tore it into a hundred pieces, and sent the story, with its "Evans, Grants, and Jacksons," floating down the river.

"Well," said Nurse, "it's a pity you did that, for I daresay it was a clever enough thing you had written, for you are that clever no one knows what you will come to."

"I am not clever one bit. I can't do my sums, and I can't learn music. Of course I am stupid, but that is why I love to think of all bright, and clever, and nice people, and pretend I know them and love them, and they love me. Yes, pretend they love me!"

Ah! poor little Regina, she was thus unconsciously to herself shadowing forth the hungry longing in every heart—the longing for love and sympathy, which is often pain to natures like hers. She peopled her own child-world, and the people were real. Even when she spoke of them thus to Nurse, they

seemed to lose their indefinite charm—they became less all her own. So in the confused stories she wrote on the old leaves of copybooks in her irregular, up and down, childish hand: the very idea of other eyes reading those histories of her imaginary friends was distressing to her. She knew Mrs. Turnbull would scoff at them and at her; that Miss Baker would call her effusions, and justly so, "a serious waste of time;" that dear good Nurse could not understand her or them; that she would be reproved, and forbidden to hold communion for the future with her imaginary friends; and there was a passionate sense of not being understood, of being a riddle to every one, and to herself also in some measure, which was almost more than she could bear.

Perhaps children who read my story will say they never have known a little girl or boy like Regina, and may think that she is too much unlike themselves in their own happy, bright, many-peopled homes to be true to life. But I may as well say that I did once know a little girl not unlike Regina, though of course there were differences. It is so many years ago now, that her childhood has long since passed into womanhood, and her womanhood into middle age. But I call her back from the past to follow her through a few years of her young life, in the hope that something may be drawn from

her day-dreams which may be interesting to those who have succeeded her in the ever-living community of children, that fresh, laughing, eager band, which keeps alive for us who are old something of the brightness of spring in the sad, quiet autumn of life.

"Well," Nurse said, sorry that this Saturday-afternoon walk should be clouded by any disagreement between her and her darling, "I speak for your good, my dear. I wish to see you more like other children, and not so absent-minded. If you were to go to a nice school now"——

"Oh, don't talk of it, Nurse, pray, pray! I could not take Puck to school, for one thing, and what should I do without him and you, and all these nice Saturday-afternoon walks by the river? Don't you love the river, Nurse?"

And Regina stopped and stood looking down on the moving stream, not a bright rushing one, but a somewhat languid, slowly flowing river, and listened to the gentle ripple amongst the rushes, and said to herself—

"It is whispering about the sea, and how fast it is going out to meet it! The great wide sea!"

Regina was disturbed in her meditations by cries and shouts, and by Nurse's exclamation—

"Look! look! There's a child fallen into the water from that barge yonder, and there's a boy running in to save him, and "——

They were at some distance from the spot, and Nurse followed as fast as she could the quick steps of Regina and Puck, who were very soon at the edge of the little group collected round poor Tim.

Puck, as we know, soon pushed his way into the centre of the group, and began sniffing round the shivering child, with his tail very much curled over his back, and one foot held up, which was always Puck's way of asking a question.

"Oh, come quick, Nurse," Regina said. "What ought to be done with the poor little boy?"

"Carried to bed, of course," was Nurse's prompt though breathless reply. "Carried to bed and put in hot blankets."

"Yes, and here goes," exclaimed a tall young man, who had come from the opposite direction, as he raised the child in his strong brawny arm. I say arm, for one was useless.

"Over to that cottage, please," said Rex; "it's our gardener's cottage, and I know Mrs. Gaze will be kind to him."

"You be quiet," said the young man, as he strode away and resisted the father's attempts to prevent him. "You be quiet, Luke Jones, and take better care of the young 'un. He'd not have had this ducking if I'd been aboard."

"You be allus right, we know, Amos," was the reply; "you be a sly one, you be."

Rex was leading the way to the gardener's cottage, when he suddenly turned round, and speaking in the frank bright manner which was so attractive, he said to Nurse, "I wish you would come and see that the little boy has what is right for him. I feel rather cold, and must run home up the Park for dry clothes."

Then he looked full at Regina. "Why, we saw you at the Bank-house the other day," he said. "I am sorry I did not remember you at first." But Rex's teeth began to chatter almost as persistently as Tim's; and leaving Amos and the child at the gate of the gardener's cottage, he ran as fast as he could to the red brick house with its many white-painted windows, calling out, "I'll be back directly."

Nurse, who always was ready in an emergency, stirred the fire in the gardener's cottage; and while she put on the kettle for a bath, she told Amos and Luke Jones to chafe the child's limbs and get off the rags which clung to his little lean figure.

It was certainly rather a startling sight for Mrs. Gaze, when she returned from the Court dairy with a jug of milk for tea, to find her neat kitchen filled with inmates like Luke and Amos.

She had, it is true, met Rex rushing towards the house, but he only called out to her that a wet child was being dried before her fire, and she was altogether in a state of bewilderment.

"Dear, dear! what a mess!" she exclaimed. "Did

I ever see the like? It will take a month to clean the floor. Dear, dear! I can't get into my own house! And making a fire this hot day enough to roast forty bullocks! Pray, may I ask you to let me into my own house, if it ain't too great a favour? and may I ask, ma'am, what you are about?"

Nurse was too much intent on the business in hand to be affronted.

"I am anxious to get this poor half-drowned little one into a hot bath; if you have a tub in the scullery we could fill. A good soaping will bring back the circulation, and take a coat of dirt off him. He ought to have a teaspoonful of brandy, if it is handy."

Mrs. Gaze's woman's heart was now moved to compassion. She got the brandy and held it to Tim's lips.

"No," he whispered hoarsely. "No, Amos; no, father, no."

The smell of spirits made the child shudder again, associated as it was in his mind with dreadful brawls between the father and young man, and perpetual quarrels and suspicion as to who had emptied the last flask of rum.

"Give him a drop of warm tea," said Nurse. "The kettle is boiling, and we'll soon make it ready. Miss Regina, my dear, had you not better go up to the Court and wait for us? You can't do any good here."

Regina felt she was useless, but she dare not go up to the Court by herself.

"I'll wait outside for you," she said to Nurse. "Is he going to die?"

"Die! No, he'll come all right. It is the shock; and then he sank twice, they say. He'll come right. We shall be late home, Miss Regina, but it can't be helped. I must go through with this now I've begun. I wish you'd go to the ladies at the Court."

"No, Nurse; pray don't ask me," Regina implored, and she turned away, and passed through the little group by the gate who were wishing to hear how "Luke's kid was."

Luke was well known on the river; I don't think I can add he was respected. "But he was not worse than scores of others," his fellow-bargemen said; "only when the drink got in him he was savage-like; kind enough when the drink was out, and fond of little Tim too, though he did thump him and knock him about till he was black and blue."

This was scarcely an exaggerated account of Luke Jones's conduct as a father, sad as it must sound to you. But there was one who loved little Tim in his own rough but protecting way, who often stood between him and his father, and who had the spirit of chivalry in him, great rough bargee as he was, and this person was Amos Barnes. He had some sort of relationship to Luke and his boy; he was a

cousin of his late wife's, and had been brought up to a seafaring life; but when he was about eighteen he had a bad fall from the mast, which had disabled one arm, and kept him in a hospital at Normouth for some months.

When he came out of the hospital he was strong and vigorous in body in all but the arm, and a giant in height and breadth; and Luke Jones agreed to give him work on board the "Sarah Anne" for very slender pay, though that one useful arm of Amos's could wield the pole with astonishing strength, and no one could haul a load better or toss it more adroitly on his shoulder. Thus, all things considered, Luke Jones had not made a bad bargain: and God had so ordered it that by the means of Amos some glimmering of the knowledge of His love should strike across the darkness of little Tim's life. While lying in the hospital, Amos had learned something of the life which was so widely apart from the vice and evil habits of the race of bargemen generally. Amos had heard, too, the story of the Cross, and the infinite love of Him who died there. All this, though imperfectly, he had learned; and loving little Tim as he did, he longed to make him share the knowledge.

Amos had much to overcome, and a hard battle to fight against his temptation to share the contents of the rum barrel. There were times when he hated the stolid, often drunken man whom he served; but, as in a dream, the words which had been printed up in the ward opposite his bed in the hospital haunted him:—

"Be ye followers of God, as dear children."

It was hard to believe he, Amos, was a child of a loving Father in heaven; but poor motherless Tim, he was a child too, and he must try to show him this, and watch his tongue and his actions for Tim's sake. How beautiful is love like that, even when seen in a rough untaught fellow like Amos Barnes!

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWILLING GUEST.

REGINA walked up the park towards the house, but soon turned into the bracken and tangled grass which skirted the drive, she was so much afraid of being seen, and dreaded nothing more than having to confront the inhabitants of the Court.

Those two girls especially, who had the air and bearing of grown-up people, who talked fast and in high-pitched tones, and who were so unlike the friends of her imaginary life, who always were gentle and loving, and spoke in soft voices!

The boy they called Rex was different. Regina thought how little had been said of his plunging into the river to save the poor dirty barge child. And yet it was a deed of courage worthy of any of her ideal heroes. No one had thanked him; no one had seemed to care that he was drenched to the skin, and that he had risked his life. For were not people often drowned in attempting to save others? It was odd that Rex should have been allowed to

run off with scarcely a word of gratitude. She almost wished she could see him and tell him what she thought; but if she did see him, her voice, she knew, would sink into a husky whisper, and she would be as shy as possible, and look stupid, as she had overheard Mrs. Turnbull tell one of her friends, "Regina always did in company."

Rex was not exactly like "company," it is true, a boy of her own age, with his frank smiling face; and yet she shrank from contact with him, and dreaded it.

Presently Puck started up from the soft nest of bracken and moss, where he had nestled by his mistress's side, and barked, flying out a few paces at the sound of carriage-wheels.

"Come back, Puck; be quiet—lie down," Regina called.

But it was too late; a low pony-carriage drew up, and a young ringing voice was heard.

"Yes, it is; it is Mrs. Turnbull's niece; that's the white dog."

Regina turned to flee, but Agnes Stuart was too quick for her. She jumped out of the carriage, giving the reins to Bertha, and was by Regina's side in a twinkling.

"We have left mother at the cottage looking after a little boy who was half drowned. Your nurse said you were gone up the drive. We will take you in the pony carriage, or would you sooner walk?"

Poor Regina stood in the defiant attitude which extreme shyness sometimes takes as its shield, and answered gruffly—

"I would rather wait here for Nurse, thank you."

"Ah! we can't let you do that. Mother said you were to stay to tea, and she would send you and your maid home. Come along!"

And Agnes took Regina's unwilling hand to lead her to the carriage. Puck resented this familiarity by a low growl, and Regina withdrew her hand and repeated—

"I would rather wait here, please."

A merry laugh was now heard from the carriage.

"You won't be able to drag her, Agnes; you'd better try pushing. Do come; the gnats are so tiresome, and Dot is stamping her feet, and I can't hold her much longer."

Agnes made another desperate clutch at Regina's hand, and said,—

"What are you afraid of? We shan't eat you. But please yourself, though it's very bad manners, I must say."

"It's bad manners to—to"—— Regina began. But now quick steps were heard coming from the direction of the house, and Rex appeared in dry clothes, his thick curls still hanging limp, and his face like a rose which had been washed by heavy rain.

"Hallo! what are you doing?" he said, and he cleared the space between the drive and the spot where Regina and Agnes stood with a bound.

This proceeding infuriated Puck, who thought the force of the enemy was increasing in number to an alarming extent. He barked and growled, and even made a dash at Rex's trousers. I ought to say, that as Puck's teeth were very small, and by no means sharp, his bark was necessarily a great deal worse than his bite.

"We want her to come up to tea," said Agnes, "and she won't; perhaps you may be able to persuade her. Anyhow, I shan't trouble myself any more; that horrid little dog deafening me, horrid little wretch! I do detest yelping dogs."

Regina's face flushed and her dark eyes flashed fire. She caught Puck up in her arms and turned resolutely into the brushwood. But Rex followed.

"I say, do come to tea," he said. "My sister was very rude about the dog, but never mind her. Somehow girls do say rude things. Come this way; there is a short cut into a path which leads to the back of the house. I know you must be tired of waiting. Do come!"

Regina found her voice now.

"I don't mind coming with you, and I wanted to

say how grand and brave I thought you were to plunge into the water to save that little ragged boy."

"Oh, nonsense! I have been like a duck in the water ever since I was seven, and I am eleven now; there's nothing in taking a header. Poor little chap! I am glad I lugged him out, though his life must be a hard one. Come now, that's right! I knew you would come at last. You will like my mother—every one does; and then there are Bunchie and Berry—they are jolly."

"Bunchie and Berry!" Regina repeated.

"Blanche and Bernard, I ought to say. They are the twins our father sent home from India with mother—such jolly little things! As to Berry, he is like a cushion, so fat and round and good-tempered; and Bunchie is the cleverest little creature. She's got all the wits, they say; but Berry has wit enough to make himself agreeable, which is something. Then there is Hamish; I am not quite sure if you'll see Hamish, but you may."

"Who is Hamish?" asked Regina, again kindling into interest.

"Oh, he is my eldest brother; he comes between the two girls and me. If you do see him, you must not look at him very much at first. He is awfully small. He has hip complaint, and lies almost always on his back; but he is so clever, and draws and paints, and knows heaps that I don't. Mother is so good to him and to us all. In time, I think, Bertha and Agnes will get more like her; but here we are!"

All this easy bright talk helped to put poor Regina a little more at ease

"Come up to the nursery first; I daresay Hamish won't really mind. He has been better to-day than he is sometimes, and I hear Berry laughing."

Regina followed up the back staircase rather slowly and unwillingly, but it was too late now to draw back. Rex opened a door on the landing and went gently in; a shout of "Rex!" greeted him as usual.

Hamish turned his head and said-

"Come here, Rex. What is this I hear about you?"

"Rex pulled a poor, poor boy out of the river, Rex did," said little Blanche.

"Yes, a poor boy!" echoed Bernard.

"And has caught his own death of cold," said Nurse wrathfully. "I hear you were standing alone down by the river, your teeth chattering like anything."

"Come here, Rex," Hamish said. "You never told me this just now."

"There was nothing to tell," said Rex, turning very red; "why should I tell?"

"Rex," Hamish said in a low tone, which only Rex could hear, "I am so proud of you."

Rex leaned his head a minute on Hamish's pillow, and when he raised it there were some suspicious drops on his long thick lashes.

"I say, Hamish, will you let Regina Randall stay here while I go back to Gaze's cottage and see how the little chap is getting on? Mother is there and Regina's nurse, looking after him, and" (in a lower tone) "Bertha and Agnes were so horridly disagreeable to her. Let her stay here. I won't be gone more than a quarter of an hour. You don't mind, Hamish?"

Hamish nodded. Bunchie and Berry had already approached Regina, and made little raids at Puck, retreating again as Puck returned the attention by whisking round them and then going back to his mistress. Then they took Regina's hands and said, or rather Bunchie said, "Come and see Hamish." Regina advanced and took the chair Rex moved towards her, saying, "This is my brother Hamish," and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

INSPECTION.

Hamish was the first to speak. "Would you mind moving your chair a little further round? I can't see you there," he said.

Regina obliged, and ventured to raise her eyes with a startled air, like a frightened deer, and look straight at Hamish.

"Well," Hamish said abruptly, "are you satisfied? I wanted to look at you; so it is only fair if the cat looks at the king, the king may look at the cat!"

This very peculiar way of opening the conversation did not help Regina. She did not know what to reply. Hamish went on painting the wing of a butterfly, which he did with marvellous accuracy and neatness, and seemed to wait for a remark. As none was forthcoming, he said, "Send that child Bunchie away. Go and play with Berry, Bunch."

But Bunchie was attracted by the visitor, and stationed herself near her, putting out a finger now and then towards Puck's fluffy head as he lay on his mistress's lap.

"I like the doggie," Bunch said. "Don't you, Hamy?"

"Pretty well."

"Draw his picture, Hamish-do!"

Hamish pushed aside his sheets of butterflies, and, taking a pencil, began to sketch the very-much-undefined form of Puck!

Bunchie watched the operation with great pleasure, and, clapping her hands, said, "Put a blue ribbon round his neck, Hamy. It is beautiful!"

"Glad you like it. Now, take it away, and go and get your tea."

"Please let me see it first," Regina said, as Bunchie was running away with her treasure. "Yes, it is like him," she exclaimed. "May I have it? That is, when you have done with it."

But Bunchie had no idea of giving up her treasure, and she toddled off with it into the next room, where Berry had already subsided with one of the little hard balls Rex had brought him a week before. He was whipping it with a piece of string tied to a stick, and enjoying a game of his own invention.

"I will paint you a better picture of Puck," Hamish said, "if you want it." Then abruptly, "Did you see my brother plunge into the river?"

"Yes; but we were not near. We saw him pull

out the child. Was it not brave and beautiful of him?"

The emphasis on the last adjective struck Hamish, and he looked with some anxiety at the speaker.

"Beautiful! yes; but then all Rex does is good. He is my brother, you know, and I have had all kinds of bad feelings about him. At first I tried to hate him, but I couldn't manage it. I am as cross and spiteful as I can be to him sometimes. But all the time I know there never was a better fellow in the world, and I say a hundred times to myself that he is far too good for us. We are not a remarkably good family, you know. We are disagreeable as a rule, and say uncomplimentary things to each other. Some of us deserve them, others don't. Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No," said Regina. "I am quite alone. I wish I had brothers and sisters. I should not care how many disagreeable things they said. I should know they loved me at the bottom of their hearts."

"Would you?" and turning suddenly to reach a bit of india-rubber which had slipped out of reach of his hand on the table screwed on his couch, he winced and made a slight sound as if in pain.

"Are you hurt?" Regina asked.

"No; that is to say, I have only set the old pain going. I have had a day's peace, so, of course, I must pay for it. I am used to it." "I am so sorry," Regina said.

But Hamish made no reference to this; lying with his eyes shut for a minute, and then recovering himself, he began to talk of other things.

"This is a pretty fellow I am trying to paint," he said. "It's a yellow under-wing moth. Rex caught it for me last evening."

"It's beautiful," Regina said. "I mean your painting is. It looks as if it was settling on the page."

"Ah! so you say; but I've not got the shadows half dark enough. I can't do any more to-day. I am done." And Hamish leaned back with a deep sigh.

"What do you care for most?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly. At least, I mean"—and Regina hesitated. "It is not very interesting to do anything when nobody cares. Of course, Nurse cares; but she does not understand, and I don't like to be praised by some one who only says it just to please me."

"No, I should think not; but go on and tell me what you do."

"So little," Regina said sadly. "I don't get on with music. Miss Baker says I am never really thinking of the music when I am playing. Perhaps I am not—not of that sort of music; but once or twice I have stood in the outside part of the cathedral—the large empty part, you know."

"Yes, I know; the nave they call it."

"Well, then I have heard music; voices going up to heaven, and rolling waters, and whispers like the river's amongst the rushes as you walk by the bank. Do you understand?"

Hamish nodded; he could not altogether follow Regina in what she said, but he liked to watch her speaking—her dark eyes lighted with a strange radiance, her head thrown back, and her expressive mouth full of graceful curves as she spoke.

"I can't draw either," she went on,—"I am worse at that than at music. You know I have ugly drawings of houses and trees like umbrellas to copy, and they are not one bit like what they pretend to be. I can't get on with arithmetic either; so, of course, I am a dunce."

"Then what can you do?" Hamish asked again.
"Work? I suppose all girls work."

Regina laughed—a little low rippling laugh.

"Oh, no! I am worse at work. I get on pretty well with French and history. I love history; and there is a cupboard with some old books of my mother's, a cupboard with a window in it, and when it is wet on Saturday afternoons I get in there and read stories. Mrs. Turnbull was going to stop that, as she did my going into the cathedral; but Mr. Turnbull said I might have out one volume at a

time, because they were my mother's books. Oh, they are delightful!"

And then Regina might have gone on to tell her new friend of her invisible companions, perhaps of her writing stories about them, and of all her imaginations, had the door not opened hastily, and Agnes exclaimed—

"Here she is! So you did come after all. Tea is ready in the schoolroom, and Bertha and mother are waiting. Rex is still at the cottage, and so is your old maid, or Nurse, as you call her. I should have thought you were too old for a nurse. Shall I wheel your sofa into the next room, Hamish?"

"No, thank you. I would rather not come. I'm tired."

Regina, who had withdrawn at once into the quiet, shy child again, gave Hamish an imploring look as Agnes took her hand and led her away, Puck following with no greater willingness than his mistress. Bunchie and Berry had each a basin of bread and milk, and they were greatly honoured by sitting up to schoolroom-tea with Regina. The little nurse-maid, Ella, was in attendance, and Nurse brought in a tray for Hamish's tea. Lady Stuart greeted Regina very kindly, and told her the pony carriage would take her and Nurse back to Norminster, so she need not be afraid of being late.

"The little boy is all right, isn't he, mother?"
Bertha asked. "What is Rex staying for?"

"Rex wants to see him more like himself before he leaves him," said Lady Stuart. "Dear brave boy! I shall have something to put into my Indian letter this week."

"It's nothing for Rex to plunge into the water," said Agnes. "I really can't see there is so much to make a fuss about."

"No," said Bertha, "and a poor little half-starved barge child might as well have been drowned."

"Bertha!" Lady Stuart exclaimed, "do not talk in that random fashion; it is very unbecoming."

"Well, really, mother, what good will that child ever do to any one? I know Hawkins says that those barge people are a nuisance, and that no one can walk by the river without hearing them swear."

"The barge children are as dear in God's sight as you are," Lady Stuart said. "If we have taken no pains to teach them better, we have no right to despise them."

"I don't care about them one way or other," said Bertha, tossing her head. "Here comes the hero. Well, Rex, how is the little water-rat?"

"Oh," said Rex, cheerfully, "he is all right now. That fine fellow with the stiff arm has carried him back to the barge, and I went on board to see the place. Such a stuffy little hole! I could hardly

breathe; but do you know, the child, little Tim, seemed delighted to get home, as he called it, and did not wish to stay in Gage's cottage?"

"Habit is second nature," Lady Stuart said. "I have heard of little vagrant street children, who, when provided with a clean bed, liked better to curl up on the floor."

"Mother," Rex continued, "did you notice that big fellow they called Amos? He helps Tim's father on the barge, and seems so kind and good to him. He had been left at Norminster to stay till Monday evening, but changed his mind and walked along the river-side, so that he reached the place where the barge was moored just after we had got Tim to Gage's cottage, and finding the barge empty, could not make out what had become of Luke or the boy."

"Have you seen Hamish?" Rex asked suddenly, turning to Regina.

A very low." Yes" was the answer.

"Oh," said Agnes, "they are quite dear friends by this time. I found them talking to each other as if they had known each other for a year."

"I hope you will come and see us very often," Lady Stuart said, addressing Regina. "It will be very nice for Hamish to have a friend, for he does not, as a rule, like to see any one outside his own family, dear boy!"

"Nor inside it either, mother," said Agnes. "I am sure we may all confess our room is more welcome than our company to Hamish."

"I shan't confess that," said Rex; "there is nothing I like better than to be with Hamish."

"But that is no proof that he likes you to be with him, you stupid boy. I have seen him sulk and snap at you as much as at any one."

"I think it is very cruel to talk of the poor fellow like that," said Rex, "and you ought to be ashamed of it."

"You ought to be ashamed of speaking rudely to your elders and superiors," said Agnes; "but I suppose you will now be more set up than ever, and get a medal from the Humane Society."

Rex bit his lips and controlled himself with a strong effort.

Lady Stuart looked grave and sad, and Regina was more surprised than I can tell you at this, her first experience of a family of brothers and sisters. She had always fancied it must be so delightful to live with boys and girls of her own age. But she began to change her mind.

The girls of her "romances," whether written or dreamed, were very much unlike these two sisters, Agnes and Bertha Stuart.

Bunchie and Berry were dear little things, it is true, and Rex a hero; and Hamish, to be his friend

would indeed be an honour. But to have to listen to Bertha and Agnes wrangling and saying disagreeable things was quite another matter.

It was with a sense of relief that Regina heard the pony carriage had been ordered, and that the time had come for returning to her lonely schoolroom and nursery at the top of the Bank-house.

This bit of real life had for the time displaced the figures from the imaginary world in which she moved, and was wholesome if disappointing. After all, there was a charm in leading a peaceful life in her own rooms.

She was very silent on the drive homewards, and let Nurse and the coachman have their conversation undisturbed. It was a double open carriage, after the fashion of the basket carriages of these days. Nurse and the coachman sat in the front seat, and Regina had the back to herself, and plenty of time to meditate on the events of the day.

The cloudless summer day was waning to its close as they drove into the city. The sun had just sunk in a golden sky, leaving a band of shaded daffodil and deep orange in the horizon.

Against this sky, the spire of the cathedral and the lofty roof of the nave, with flying buttresses and turrets, stood out clear and sharp. The roofs of the houses were glowing deeply red, and the cool air from the river came up from the Close as the carriage turned into Bank Plain.

One of Mrs. Turnbull's neat maid-servants opened the large heavy door at the side of the house and exclaimed—

"Wherever have you been, Nurse? You are to go at once to my mistress, Miss Regina, and you'll catch it, I can tell you."

CHAPTER VIII.

REPROOF.

LEAVING Puck to Nurse, and passing through the long, silent drawing-room, Regina softly opened the door of what was called the little drawing-room, where Mrs. Turnbull usually sat. The large drawing-room was only used on very grand occasions, and everything in it was so tied up in holland covers, that it was almost ghostly in Tall, high-backed chairs covered with appearance. fine needlework stood in rows against the walls in their white garments. Regina always used to think they looked like nuns seated in a row at chapel. She had read "Rokeby," and most of Sir Walter Scott's poems and novels: her ideas of nuns and convents were taken from them.

"Where have you been, Richenda?" Mrs. Turnbull asked, looking up from a pile of papers and letters, on which, though it was evening, she was engaged. "I must really tell Nurse that I shall forbid these Saturday-afternoon expeditions.

It is quite impossible that I can allow you to form these unpunctual habits. Don't lean on the table, and pray do not rest one foot on the other; it wears out your shoes. Where have you been?"

"We went by the river as far as Barrow," Regina said.

"Much too far; it is four miles."

"It is only three," Regina explained, "and we should have been home, cousin Mary, by six o'clock, if a boy had not fallen into the river."

"A most dangerous thing it is for you to walk in that direction—a dreamy child like you. I shall forbid you to go there in future."

Here the rustling of a newspaper in the corner of the room was heard, and Mr. Turnbull looked over the top of it, saying—

"Well, as the child did not fall into the water, I think she may be allowed to walk towards Barrow."

"I am the best judge of that. All I can say is, that in future on Saturdays I expect you, Richenda, to be at our tea-table at six o'clock. It is the only day when you do take tea with us, and I must insist on punctuality."

"I had tea at Barrow Court with the Stuarts," Regina said, more boldly. "Lady Stuart was very kind to me."

"Lady Stuart! Oh, if she invited you to tea it alters the case a little. At the same time, my

dear, you must not accept invitations without referring to me; and above all things, do not push yourself in where you are not wanted. Little girls of eleven years old must be very careful in these things."

Regina felt her desire to give the history of Tim's rescue and Rex's bravery die within her. She advanced to say good-night, when the newspaper moved, Mr. Turnbull's face appeared over it, and he beckoned Regina to the corner by the window where he was reading. He was always kind to Regina when he had the opportunity, which was not often; for Regina had breakfast and tea in the schoolroom with Nurse and Miss Baker, and only appeared at the one-o'clock dinner, where she seldom found courage to utter a word.

"So you have had a pleasant afternoon, my dear," Mr. Turnbull said. "That's right," and he put his arm kindly round her. "They are nice children at Barrow Court. We must ask them here to spend the day. Would you like it?"

Regina hardly knew what to answer. She might like to have the Stuarts, that is, Rex and the twins, in her own territory up the backstairs, but the thought of Agnes and Bertha as company in the drawing-room was quite another matter.

"I don't know," she said, with her eyes downcast.
"Well, well! we will see about it," Mr. Turnbull

said. "Good-night, my dear." He kissed her on the cheek and resumed his newspaper.

"That child wants companions of her own age, Mary," he said to his wife. "I begin to think she ought to go to school."

"I thought her father left you solely responsible for her education. So pray please yourself, and send her to school if you think best."

"You ought to be a better judge of what a girl needs than I am," Mr. Turnbull answered. "Couldn't she be more downstairs with us? I seldom see her."

"Every day at dinner," Mrs. Turnbull said, "and I make it a duty to take her a drive occasionally; but really she is so gruff in her manner and so painfully shy, that it is no pleasure either to her or to me."

"We think of her as older than she is," said Mr. Turnbull. "Why, she is but a baby still, and uncommonly clever in some ways, from all I hear."

"Clever! Oh, no! She has a good memory, and has caught up French quickly, M. de Vallerie says; but she is stupid to a degree with arithmetic, and very obstinate about music and drawing, as Miss Baker would tell you. But my chief fault with her is, that she is so devoid of affection—most unloving."

Mr. Turnbull murmured something which was scarcely audible, put his hands in his pockets, and went out of the room to return to the Bank-parlour for the usual winding up and signature of letters, which fell to the resident partner's share every Saturday evening.

Meanwhile Regina was perched upon the deep window-seat of the schoolroom window, thinking over her day, talking half to herself and half to Puck, as was her fashion.

The sunset glow had faded from the sky, and stars were coming out over the roof of the houses, and one very bright one was looking down from its height just above the tower of the church. The streets were nearly deserted; a few people were standing at one corner of Bank Plain, and a horse was being led up and down, waiting for one of the senior clerks in the Bank, who lived in the country.

Regina, with her forehead pressed against the window, saw all that was before her, taking it in without any conscious effort, and making deep blue sky, church tower, and watching stars a sort of framework for the pictures of that afternoon—pictures which had all the interest of living reality, and yet were seen through the halo of her romance and imagination.

Hamish lying on his couch in pain and suffering, yet understanding her so much better than most people did. The beautiful moth painted by his little thin fingers—fingers so small and delicate that the blue veins were distinctly traced in them.

Rex, with his bright, frank face—so quick in words and movement—so swift to plunge into those dark waters—so slow to take any credit to himself for what he did. Rex! well named—king indeed. Already Regina had planned a romance where Rex was the knight who fought for the weak, and she the lady to give him the crown as a prize.

"A crown of laurels, Puck; that is so much better than a gold one—grander far."

Then there was gentle Lady Stuart. The very touch of her hand and sound of her voice were sweet.

"Oh. I could love her. Puck. and I would do anything to please her. It is so strange those two girls don't seem to care much for her or anything. I don't wish them to come here; they would only make fun of me, and of you too, Puck. We don't want them, do we? And I look different to them somehow, not pretty or nicely dressed. frocks of theirs were so pretty, Puck with frills all crimped in rows round the skirt, one pink and white, the other lilac and white. Then they had such lovely long gold chains, and Agnes had a bunch of seals and a key hanging to hers, and such pretty lace at the throat; and I did look different, of course, in this straight, ugly, grey alpaca frock and cape, and hat with grey ribbons. But what does it matter, Puck? Strange, isn't it, that I have always dressed my girl, my friend, in pretty things?

Velvet mantles and silk, shot silk, and bonnets with white, wavy feathers, like your tail, Puck; but I never before thought my own dress was so—so—hideous; yes, that is the word."

"Come, Miss Regina, my dear, do take your supper, and don't sit star-gazing up there. It is Saturday night, remember, and the hot water for your bath will be brought up directly. Here is the tray with your supper. Cook made you this little custard all to yourself, and here is a bottle of her new brew of ginger-beer. Come, my dear!"

Regina awoke to the reality of her supper, and duly appreciated the delicate custard, with its flaky edge of crust, and its creamy, yellow top covered with nutmeg.

Nurse was quite delighted to see her child enjoy what she had provided, and thankful that what she had said about the manuscript was forgotten and forgiven.

"Dear me! I am tired, if you are not," said Nurse. "The work I had rubbing that poor child when he came out of the bath! Poor little thing! he was two or three shades lighter in colour after it than before. He'll be as brown and dirty as ever by this day week, I daresay. What a fine young gentleman Master Rex is, to be sure! The servants told me he was as good as he looked, and that his patience with the tantrums of the poor cripple was

just wonderful. Did you see him, my dear Miss Regina?"

"Oh, yes! It is too bad to call him a cripple or to say he has tantrums. Who wouldn't be cross lying in the same position day after day with horrid pain to bear?"

"Yes, that's true; we don't know where other folks' shoes pinch. We have got to learn everything by experience, I say. The two young ladies are very smart and think a deal of themselves; that's all because they have been to school."

"They have not really been to school; they lived with a lady who takes girls to teach. Sir Montague left them with her when he went away last time. But, Nurse, I think I should like to have pretty muslin dresses like theirs—all clear, and bright, and cool."

"Muslin! they rumple in no time and are very bad wear, and the lot of ironing these frills want, you would hardly believe. I am sure your little grey check silk is as pretty a frock as any child need want, and you'll put that on to-morrow, you know. You always look nice in that and your white bonnet —as well as the Miss Stuarts any day."

Regina was hardly convinced, but the desire for a frilled muslin was but a passing one. Her last thought that night was about Tim.

"I wonder what he is doing," she said to Nurse,

"and whether he is thinking of Rex and thanking him in his heart?"

"I daresay he is asleep by now in that little room in the barge. Dear me! how it smelt of onions, and herrings, and old boots! It was enough to turn one's stomach. I am glad you did not go there, but were safe at the Court when the young man carried him in. I had rather a curiosity to see the inside of a barge, and I am glad I had the chance for once; but how people can live, as they do, cooped up in those little cribs of cabins, beats me. Good-night, my dear!" And with a kiss, to which Regina sleepily responded, Nurse left her to her dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

RIVER LIFE.

THE "Sarah Anne" went down the river to Normouth with the tide, which had just turned as it lay-to below what was called the Friar's Bridge.

This was a general place of meeting for the barges on Saturday nights, and the families who lived on board availed themselves of the pause in the up-and-down, down-and-up river journeys to go into the town to buy provisions, and too often to frequent public-houses far into the night.

In the year about which I am writing there was no early closing of public-houses. Coffee-taverns were unknown, and in seaport places like Normouth rum was the favourite drink. There was a small cask of rum in most barges, and deadly was the mischief which it wrought amongst the men and women employed upon them. The half-stupid, half-sullen condition in which this strong drink left bargemen, even when they were not really drunk, was deplorable. Luke Jones was an instance

of it. When he was not able to get it, he was savage and miserable; when he did get it, he was heavy and stupid.

The natural feelings of a father, which the sight of his child's danger had roused within him, soon sank down again into his usual sleepy indifference. The rum cask was empty, and he began to growl at Amos as soon as they were fairly off again.

Amos was wonderfully patient. Tim was asleep, worn out with the shock and the scrubbing administered by Regina's nurse, and Amos was unwilling to wake him.

Thus he contented himself with simply saying he did not know where the rum had gone—he hadn't touched it—he hated it.

As soon as the "Sarah Anne" was moored, Luke Jones went off with a heavy tread to the "Maid's Head," and Amos knew he would be there for hours.

Presently a woman's voice was heard from one of the moored barges calling Amos by name.

- "Where's the child?" she asked.
- "Down below," was the reply. "He had a ducking up by Barrow, and was nearly drowned."
 - "Dear heart! how was that?"
- "I was not there to see," said Amos, evading a direct answer. "He's asleep now, but he looks queer somehow—so white. Will you come and look at him, Susan?" Then, as Susan hesitated, he said, "I'll put

the plank across;" and he was suiting the action to the word when a shrill voice from the cabin of the barge called out to Susan to come back and not dare to set foot on that brute Luke Jones's barge.

"Very well, Grannie, very well," was the reply; "keep easy."

"You haven't got a pinch of tea you could give me for the child when he awakes?" Amos said. "I think he want's summut, for he is so limp and white."

Susan nodded and said in as low a voice as would reach him, "I'll make a cup in no time, and when Grannie is asleep, I'll come over with it. Mum's the word now;" and with this she disappeared.

When Amos returned to the cabin, he struck a light and peered with some anxiety into Tim's face. A very white little face it was, and Amos felt half afraid that Tim's was the sleep that would know no waking.

He was relieved, however, by Tim opening his eyes; a faint smile broke over his face.

- "Amos!"
- "Yes, my boy! What's the matter?"
- "Nothing! Did I fall into the water, Amos?"
- "Yes, my boy, so they told me; I wasn't there."
- "No, Amos," and Tim drew his friend's head close to his pillow. "Father didn't mean to roll me in. Don't tell nobody; don't tell Susan."
 - "No, I won't tell," said Amos huskily, "I won't tell."

"I'd like to have a breath of air up above, it's so hot here."

"All right! I'll carry you on deck;" and the one strong vigorous arm raised the child to his breast, and Tim curled his thin little arm round Amos's neck.

"It will strike you chill after this heat," Amos said; and ducking his head, he took an old pea-jacket from a locker with his teeth, and dropped it down over the child before he ascended the two or three steps to the deck.

"That's nice," said Tim, nestling against his friend's broad breast. "And how the stars be shining! There's one—such a whopping big one! Look, Amos!"

"Susan is making a cup of tay for you, Tim. You likes tay?"

"Yes," Tim said faintly; "but I don't want nothing now but to bide quiet. Amos, suppose I'd been drownded; you'd have been sorry?"

"Shouldn't I?" said Amos, pressing the child closer. "Of course I should; but you ain't drownded. A brave young gentleman just saved you; so they told me. He had a fine face, he had."

"I saw him, didn't I? But it all seems like a muddle. I went in with a great whop, and then it was dark, and then I heard father screech and swear, and then"——

"Well, don't think no more of it," said Amos; "let's thank God you are safe."

"Tell me something nice, Amos, about what the lady told you."

"I'm a roughish sort of hand at telling you, Tim; but look you here—as soon as ever I can I'll get you a smart suit at one of the slopshops on the quay, and we'll go to church some fine Sunday."

"To-morrow is Sunday; let's go then."

"Why, no, not to-morrow; for you see your ragged clothes were all so sopped through and through, we wrapped you up in this loose sort of a thing the old lady lent you."

"Have I got no clothes then?" said Tim.

"Not much of 'em, I must say; but we'll set that right when your father pays me his next wage, and then we'll go to church. I saw a nice smart little blue suit with brass buttons hanging up at the slopshop, and I said to myself, that's the very thing for a little chap as I know of."

Tim gave a sigh of doubtful anticipation.

"Ah! but it'll cost too much tin, I 'spect. Amos, I wish you'd try and tell that tale the lady told you, about some One who loved the whole world, the folks in big houses and the folks in little ones. And did she say folks in barges too?"

"She didn't say exactly that, but she meant it; for you see, Tim, it was the whole world the Lord Jesus loved."

"Ah!" said Tim, "of course barges are in the

world, only folks don't seem as if they thought so."

"No, that's true," said Amos, "that's true; but the Lord Jesus—that's what the lady called Him, Tim—He isn't a bit like grand folks here. It was all done for love of the poorest, as well as the richest."

"What was done?"

"Why, dying a cruel death, and living a life on earth that poor people like us lead. That's to say, He had nothing grand or smart, and He worked with His hands, and cured sick folks, and made blind folks see. And this is what I remember most: there was a poor fellow who had a withered, shrunk-up arm like mine, and He just told him to stretch it out, and it got like the other all at once."

"O Amos! is that true?"

"I believe it's quite true," Amos answered. "But this is the best of it, Tim: He, the Lord Jesus; can hear you and me now when we ask Him for aught, and He loves us now."

"Ah! then I'll ask Him straight away to cure your arm, Amos."

Amos was silent.

"If He can, why doesn't He?" the child continued.

"I don't know," was the answer, "except p'raps it wouldn't be good for me."

"It must be good for you," was Tim's low and puzzled answer.

"Poor little chap! he is done up," Amos said, as the child's head fell back on his shoulder. "I wish Susan would bring the tay."

And even as he wished it, a low whistle from the next barge was heard, and putting Tim down on the deck covered with the old jacket, Amos went to place the plank between the "Sarah Anne" and the "Fairy," and give it a steadying hand as Susan crossed it.

Susan, or "Black-eyed Sue," as the barge people on the river called her, came with a little black teapot, a tray made of the top of a cask, a mug, and a little milk in a bottle. In spite of her loud voice and rather bold manner, Susan had a kind, womanly heart.

"Lor, poor little chap! I can scarcely see, though the stars are so bright, and there's pretty near no night at this time of year. Here, Tim, here's some nice warm tea and a drop of milk; and look, a slice of bread and bacon!"

But Tim turned his head away and said, "I can't eat nothing."

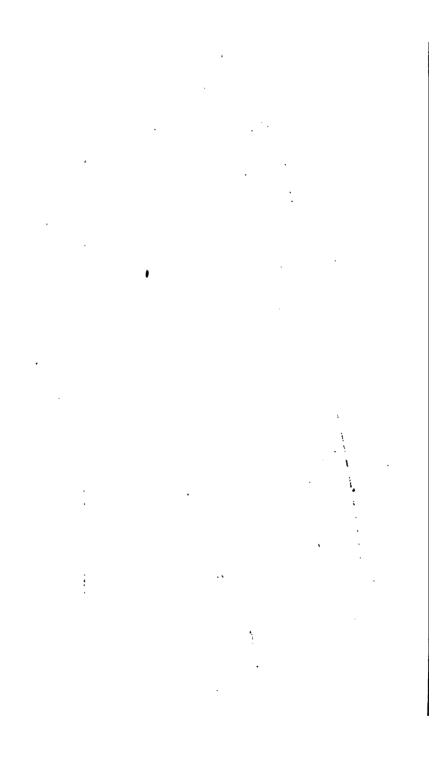
"Well, but drink, then. See here! Pick him up, Amos; he'll get at it more handy."

Amos obeyed, and to his satisfaction Tim took the mug, in his little thin brown hand and drained every drop of tea.

"There! that's right. Have some more presently."



"Tim took the mug in his little thin brown hand, and drained every drop of tea."—Page 82.



But Tim closed his eyes, and seemed inclined to say no more, and to drink no more either.

"He's awful tired and done for," said Susan.

"Shame on his father not to keep him more decent in clothes and food; but we know where Luke Jones's money goes. The barge-life is hateful. I wish I'd done with it, I know, though we do keep things a bit tidy in the 'Fairy.'"

"Aye, that you do," said Amos. "If I was to go ashore into town to-morrow, would you look after the child a bit for me? He's naked, and must get clothes."

"His father ought to buy 'em, then. Don't you be a soft now, Amos. What have you got to do with the child? Let his father mind his own. The shops are shut on Sundays, so you can't buy the clothes, and a good thing too."

Amos rubbed his left foot up and down; it did double duty, always expressing what the poor helpless arm would have done if it could have moved.

"Well, I'd be glad, all the same, if you would take him for a bit on board the 'Fairy.' I am bound for a place up town where I'll take that child some day."

"I'll take care of him for you fast enough, only don't let me see his good-for-nothing father, or I'll be letting him know a piece of my mind which won't be agreeable. And now I'll be going; just let me carry the child down and try to make his cot tidy."

Amos committed the child gladly to Susan's arms, and she descended the few steps with him. A dim oil lamp showed a faint yellow light, and Susan looked in dismay at the little trough against the side of the barge where Tim was to be laid. I need not tell you there were no sheets or blankets. A bit of sailcloth much patched covered the old locker, and a bundle of very mixed materials was rolled up for a bolster. A patchwork quilt, torn, stained, and ragged, completed the furniture of Tim's bed. Susan smoothed it as best she could, and stroking back the masses of hair from the white forehead, she kissed it once or twice.

"Amos!" Tim whispered, "Amos, don't 'ee let me fall in the water again."

"No, no, my dear! You are all right, and you have only got to go to sleep, and you'll wake as fresh as a daisy to-morrow. Good-night!"

Then Susan ascended again, and was over the plank into the "Fairy" before Amos had time to think of helping her by making the plank safe.

He drew it in to the "Sarah Anne" with a sigh, and lighting his pipe, sat down with his back to the cabin, and waited for the return of his master. The dawn had broken in the east before Luke Jones's heavy tread was heard. He stumbled down the stairs to bed without a word, carrying a black bottle with him; and Amos, curling himself in an old sail, was soon asleep.

CHAPTER X.

AN INVITATION.

- "HERE is an invitation for you, children," Lady Stuart said one morning at breakfast.
- "When? from whom?" asked Bertha and Agnes eagerly.
- "You can read the note; it is from Mrs. Turnbull at the Bank."
- "Oh, is that all?" said Agnes. "I hoped it was something far nicer."

Bertha unfolded the letter and read:-

"Dear Lady Stuart,—Will you allow your two daughters and your son to spend the day here on Friday with Richenda Randall? I propose driving them back in the evening to Barrow Court after taking tea at St. Michael's Hill en route. We shall be glad to see the young party as early as it may suit you to send them. With kind compliments, believe me, dear Lady Stuart,—Yours truly,

"MARY JEMIMA TURNBULL"

- "What a letter! Such a formal stupid invitation!" said Bertha.
- "Mary Jemima! what a name! Ugly names seem to run in the family," exclaimed Agnes.
- "I don't wish to go at all. Say we are particularly engaged with friends at home. Stupid, stuck-up woman!"
- "Bertha, you forget yourself. That is not the way for a little girl to speak of a lady who is kind enough to invite you to her house."
- "Little girl! Mamma, I am nearly fourteen. No one thought of calling me a little girl at Cheltenham."
 - "Well, I would not make myself out older than I was, if I were you, Bertha; for I can only hope when you are older you will know better."
 - "Must we go really, mamma? What shall we do all day? And fancy taking tea at Michael's Mount! That is where the shop-people go out for a holiday, Nurse says."
 - "It's jolly up there, for all that," said Rex.
 "There are heaps of strawberries, and you are turned loose to eat as many as you like."
 - "How charming!" said Agnes. "You see I happen to like strawberries gathered for me, with powdered sugar and cream. I hate stooping over strawberry-beds and getting hot for nothing."
 - "Must we go, mother?" Agnes asked. "That

little old-fashioned child, with her queer name changed into a grand one! It is quite alarming to be with her for a whole day."

Lady Stuart quietly said-

"Give me Mrs. Turnbull's note, please, Bertha. I shall tell her you will be at the Bank-house by twelve o'clock on Friday."

Bertha consoled herself by tossing back her long fair curls and saying—

"Well, it will be rather fun to tease her and surprise her with our fine things."

"If I am there, you'll not have the chance of teasing," said Rex as he was leaving the room; but his mother called him back.

"Reginald, wait a minute, please. I want to tell you that Mr. Goodwin is coming to-day to be introduced to you and Hamish. He is to begin lessons with you next week, and he would like to know what you can do. You must have your books ready; and you must also tell Mr. Goodwin how far you have gone in arithmetic and Latin. Bertha and Agnes, M. Vallerie is to give you French lessons, and I will go on with your music and other lessons in the mornings Mr. Goodwin is not here. I hope we shall settle down happily to our work after such a long holiday; and above all things, let us hold loyally to each other, and all do our best."

- "I thought we were to go to school near London," Bertha said.
- "No; your father wishes you to have a year at home with me. Is that such a great hard-ship?"
- "Oh, no, you darling mother!" Agnes exclaimed; "it will be delightful;" and she threw her arms round Lady Stuart's neck.
- "Rex is to get ready for Winchester. His name is down, but it may be two years before he goes there. His father wishes him to be taught with Hamish, that is, as much as Hamish can bear."
- "He will soon leave me far behind," Rex said.
 "Now here they come to add their opinion."
- "They," namely, Bunchie and Berry, came toddling in, Berry measuring his length on the carpet before he reached his mother's side. He picked himself up without any sound of woe, and Rex immediately went down on all-fours and invited Berry to make a pony of him, rearing and kicking out his heels in the most approved fashion.

Bunchie, who rather despised these gambols, had climbed the high chair by her mother, and prepared to repeat one of her verses in slow, distinct tones.

"Hush, now, dear Rex," said Lady Stuart.
"Bunchie is going to say her little poem."

Poor Berry, who looked on this performance as

one which left him quite in the background, hid his face on Rex's shoulder and whispered—

"I can say a verse as well as Bunch."
"Wait a minute, Berry, and then you shall begin,"

"Dear mother, said a little fis', Pray, is not that a fly? I'm very hungry, and I wis' You'd only let me try.

said Rex, encouragingly; "listen to Bunchie."

"Wait, innocent! the mother said, And started from her nook; That cruel fly was made to hide The sharpness of the hook."

Here Bunch sighed and paused. The fate of the disobedient fish was hanging in the balance.

"Now, as I've said, this little trout
Was young and foolish too,
And so he thought he'd venture out,
And see what he could do.

"Then round about the fly he played, With many a longing look, And, Dear me! to himself he said, I am sure that's not a hook.

"I think I'll give one little pluck.

Let's see; yes, so I will.

(With desperate emphasis.)

And so he did—and lo, it stuck

Right through his little gill.

"And as he faint and fainter grew,
With hollow voice he cried,
Dear mother, had I minded you,
I should not now have died!"

Bunchie's last words were almost smothered by kisses from her mother and Agnes.

"It's quite wonderful to hear her," said Agnes, "little darling! I think she had better come to Mr. Goodwin and go through an examination. She is certain to prove the sharpest pupil."

"What time is Mr. Goodwin coming?"

"About eleven, I think. Now you had better go to the schoolroom and get everything ready, while I see how Hamish is."

Lady Stuart found Hamish by his window in the old place. He looked up brightly and smiled.

"I have had a good night," he said, in answer to her question, and returning her kiss with some warmth. "Is the tutor come?"

"No; but he will be here soon. Would you like to go into the schoolroom to be ready for him?"

"Yes, I think I should; but I'm an awful dunce."

"I don't think so, Hamish. I expect you will be as clever as your father."

Hamish's eyes brightened.

"Well," he said, "I have made up my mind to try to learn something, to please him and you," he added. "What is the tutor like—young or old?"

- "Middle-aged, perhaps fifty."
- "That's old," said Hamish quickly.
- "Old in your eyes," his mother said, smiling. "Mr. Goodwin has had a great deal of trouble; he has lost money, and has tried to provide for his sons and daughters by very hard work. A few months ago the Bishop gave him the little living of St. Michael's, and Mr. Turnbull heard that he was very anxious to get pupils. We both knew something of Mr. Goodwin in his more prosperous days. My brothers were in his house at St. Winifred's public school, and we know what an admirable master he was. He lost a favourite son by an accident, and then a bank failed in which he had placed his money, so that he was for a time quite crushed. Then your father, when he was in England last, made interest with the Bishop about the living, and he is settled there with his wife and one of his daughters. He seemed pleased at the idea of coming here to give you lessons twice or three times a week, and I hope it may be a mutual benefit."
- "Does he know I am like this?" Hamish asked anxiously.
- "He knows you are obliged to lie upon a sofa, otherwise I think I should have sent you all to St. Michael's Rectory, instead of allowing Mr. Goodwin to come here."
 - "Sometimes I think," Hamish said in a low,

hesitating voice, "I should like to try walking on crutches. I did try once, but it hurt me awfully, and I saw Mrs. Crofton at Brighton was inclined to laugh at me for trying."

"O Hamish! no one would laugh at you; but we must get leave first from Dr. Finch before we try again. Now shall I read to you?"

And Hamish drew from under his cushion the little square Bible from which Lady Stuart read to him every morning. She read very slowly, verse by verse, pausing sometimes to make some remark, or waiting for a question from Hamish.

This quarter of an hour passed with his mother was one of the happiest of Hamish's day. Lady Stuart never allowed anything to interfere with it, and it was her great hold on the boy.

To-day he was silent, and only said, "If I work very hard, perhaps I shall be able to read the Greek Testament."

"I have no doubt of it, dear boy, and no one could be more likely to teach you to do so than Mr. Goodwin. Now I will call Nurse and we will wheel you into the schoolroom."

The door was opened, and, with Nurse's help, Hamish's sofa was placed by the side of the table, where Bertha and Agnes were arranging their books.

"He will take up so much room there," said

Bertha. "If Mr. Goodwin sits at that end, none of us will be able to get near him."

Lady Stuart saw the flush on Hamish's face, and looking reprovingly at Bertha.

"Can't he come here to the end of the table, mamma?"

"I'll come nowhere if you don't want me," said the boy; "wheel me back again."

"Bertha, move your books farther down, please," said Lady Stuart quietly; while Nurse, less reticent, exclaimed—

"How selfish you are, Miss Bertha! One would have thought you would have been pleased your poor brother should have a little change and variety. You are just eaten up with selfishness."

"Thank you!" said Bertha; "you are very complimentary. I should say you were eaten up with disagreeableness, if I were asked."

A sharp retort was on Nurse's lips, when the footman came to the door to say Mr. Goodwin was in the library; and telling Nurse to go and summon Rex from the dining-room, where he was still goodnaturedly amusing the twins, Lady Stuart went to meet the tutor.

CHAPTER XL

THE TUTOR.

"I HAVE seen him," said Rex, coming in with a pile of rather dilapidated-looking books, the top one falling off as he shut the door with his back. "I have seen him!"

"Well, what is he like?" asked Agnes. "A sharp little man, with red hair and spectacles, and a squeaking voice?"

"No, quite wrong. He is a tall, big man, with a bald head and a quantity of grey hair."

"I daresay it is a wig," said Bertha.

"Oh, no; it can't be a wig, for the top of his head is shining. He looks awfully clever, and as if he knew what's what."

"Well, I should hope he did," said Hamish.
"Did he speak to you?"

"Well, he did and he did not. I was on my knees rummaging in that cupboard in the library for this old atlas when Carter brought him in. I stumbled to my feet, and these horrid books would all keep falling over each other. It was

very awkward, for I could not say good morning properly, and I knew my hair was like a furze bush."

"Nothing uncommon in that," said Hamish.

"'One of my pupils, eh?' I heard presently, and his voice was not squeaky, but sounded as if—as if,"—Rex hesitated,—"as if it came out of his boots. All I thought of was making for the door; and would you believe it, my 'Cæsar' danced off again and left one cover behind it. Then he,—I mean the tutor,—picked it up; and I was just thanking him when mother came in, and then of course it was all right at once. They will be here directly. Am I to sit here? Why Hamish ought to be nearest to him. Hush! I hear them coming."

"Are we to get up and curtsey and say, 'Good morning, your reverence,' or 'Good day, sir!' like the proper school-girls in little story-books do?" said Agnes.

"Don't, pray don't," Rex entreated, as Agnes pushed back her chair and made a series of bobbing curtseys at the door.

She had not composed herself at the table again before the steps drew near. There was a murmur of voices, and in came Lady Stuart with Mr. Goodwin.

"These are your pupils," Lady Stuart said.

"Agnes and Bertha, come and speak to Mr. Good-

win. Rex, I think, you have seen; and this," turning to Hamish's sofa, "is our eldest son, whom I expect you will find your best pupil."

Mr. Goodwin had a quick, jerking manner, not at all what might have been expected from his height and weight. He was so ponderous, tall, and big, that it was a surprise to see him moving quickly.

"So you have got all your books ready," he said.
"Am I to look at the young ladies' first?"

Then, just as he was seating himself, Mr. Goodwin caught sight of an old print on the wall, and darted off to examine it.

"A fine line engraving," he said; "and there's another. They are valuable possessions."

All the four pairs of young bright eyes were following Mr. Goodwin in his circuit of the room, and the admiration for the two dark, old engravings in black frames did not find a response. Only a few days before Bertha had asked to have those ugly, dull pictures removed from the schoolroom.

"They belonged to my husband's mother," Lady Stuart said. "The winter scene and the portrait of Gerard Douw's mother are, I believe, rather rare."

At last Mr. Goodwin had seated himself at the table, and Lady Stuart left the room. Then, throwing back his head instead of looking at the books, Mr. Goodwin looked at the children without saying a word. Presently he said abruptly to Rex—

"You are reading 'Cæsar,' I suppose. Well, let me hear what you can do. Open anywhere and begin."

Poor Rex's colour came to his face and he mur-

"I am not at all clever at Latin."

But the only answer was-

"Go on! No, I don't want the book,"

Great was the admiration excited by the tutor's powers when it was found that he positively knew "Cæsar" by heart; that is, he corrected Rex's errors, which were many, just as if the book were before him.

- "That will do; pass it on to your sister."
- "I have not got beyond the primer," said Bertha.
 "We have learned more French than Latin."
- "And I have begun Italian," said Agnes, "which is a lovely language."

Mr. Goodwin nodded. Then, with a tone very much less jerky and more encouraging, he said to Hamish—

- "Have you gone as far in 'Cæsar' as your brother?"
 - "I know nothing," was the faint reply.
- "Well," said Mr. Goodwin, "that's a frank confession. I think we will all assume we are in your case and begin at the beginning—with Latin, at any rate."

Then followed an examination in arithmetic. Mr. Goodwin "set a paper," as they say in schools, and, leaning back with his hands folded behind his head, awaited the result. But though he appeared to be perusing the ceiling and the walls, and anything but the pupils, he was going over in his mind the first impressions which each left on him. He took in at a glance that Bertha and Agnes had a very good opinion of themselves, and that Rex had a very humble one. But the boy on the couch interested him the most, and he was pleased to have the opportunity of helping him in any way to bear his inactive life.

Bertha's sum was right, Agnes's wrong in one figure. Rex had attained the right answer by a very roundabout process, while Hamish had not attempted his at all.

- "I must go back to something easier," he said;
 "I am such a dunce."
- "Why, Hamish, it is a very easy sum," Agnes exclaimed.
- "Yes, indeed," said Bertha; "so ridiculously easy!"

A sharp, keen glance from the tutor's eyes—those deep-set but very observant eyes—made Bertha feel rather uncomfortable.

"We'll try what we can do next time, Miss Bertha, to make a ridiculously difficult proposition." Then, after showing them all what they were to prepare for the next lesson, Mr. Goodwin left the schoolroom. Lady Stuart met him in the hall.

"I did not remain in the room," she said, "for I thought you would all get on better without me. What do you think of them?"

"There is plenty of ability in the girls, I should say, but everything has been rather superficial. The boy Reginald is backward, decidedly backward for eleven, but a nice fellow, and a face which is full of sweetness and goodness. The poor invalid is an interesting study. What is his complaint?"

"Hip disease. He has undergone several operations at Brighton, but with little result. It is very sad to see how much he suffers."

"Ought he not to get about a little on crutches?"

"I think he might do so with advantage, but he is very sensitive about his height, and shrinks from all personal remarks. Perhaps it may come in time; but you know," she added, "I am only beginning my duties here, and I have so much to learn."

Mr. Goodwin looked at the youthful mother of these boys and girls, and wondered how she could bear the weight of the new duties of which she spoke.

"A pretty good handful those two young ladies must be for her to manage," he said to himself as he walked away to St. Michael's Rectory.

Mrs. Goodwin was in the verandah when he reached the house.

"Well," she said, looking up from some geraniums she was arranging in pots on a stand,—"Well, how did you get on?"

"There was not much getting on to-day; it was more like a full stop. Lady Stuart herself is charming, and the children very backward. They know nothing," was the short answer.

"Really! How strange it is that a man like Sir Montague Stuart should have neglected his children's education! I am rather sorry you should have to work like this, so much beneath you."

"Don't be sorry. In this little parish, with its handful of people, I should find it harder to have nothing to do. Besides, there is the remuneration. I must remember that you and Ada would have next to nothing to live on if I died. I must try and save for you."

Ada was Mr. Goodwin's daughter, who now came from the open French window to say dinner was waiting. She had very bad sight—indeed, was nearly blind—so she could not go out as a governess like her youngest sister; but she was, in spite of her infirmity, the life and light of her father's house.

CHAPTER XII.

GUESTS.

"Your little friends will be here about twelve o'clock to-day, Regina," Mrs. Turnbull said as Regina was leaving the dining-room after breakfast.

Midsummer holidays had begun, and Miss Baker and M. de Valerie had discontinued their visits to the Bank-house for six weeks.

"Take care that you are ready, and wear your best frock, as the Miss Stuarts are very elegantly dressed—far too much dressed for my taste, but of course they occupy a certain position."

The words "certain position" did not convey the usual meaning to Regina's mind. She interpreted "certain" as "secure," and did not understand it as expressive of distinction.

"I should like some muslin frocks very much," she ventured to say, "like the Miss Stuarts."

"Then Puck must be dismissed to the stables, my dear. We don't nurse animals in pink and white muslin dresses. I have a great deal to attend to

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"It was before this portrait Rigenda paused."—Page 103.

this morning, as I am going to give up my afternoon to your amusement. The carriage will be round at three o'clock, and we shall take tea at St. Michael's."

Regina left the room and crossed the wide hall to the boundary-line. Suddenly she paused. As she had not Puck with her, she would venture up the wide white staircase. At the top of the staircase, which formed a gallery, there were a good many pictures. Her father's picture hung in the hall, but here were many stiff portraits of ladies and gentlemen who bore her name. Some of them were distinguished by little gold labels with the name, and the ladies wore stiff plain gowns with muslin handkerchiefs crossed over their breast, and their tall caps with little crimped strings tied under the chin. No ornaments of any kind were seen on these ladies, for they belonged, like most of Richenda's ancestors, to the Society of Friends. Her father had broken the rule then rigidly enforced, and had married a lady who was not a Quaker. It was before this portrait Richenda paused.

That laughing face under its wide straw-hat had always a great fascination for her. Her mother, her young beautiful mother, always smiling and young, looking so different to the row of stately, precise Quaker ladies that hung around her. The name was printed below. Even in that she seemed

distinct from the others. It was such an uncommon and musical sounding name—

"EVELINA ADELA RANDALL, OBIT MAY 18—, AGED 22."

It was seldom that Regina passed along this corridor, for, as I have told you, it was forbidden ground; and even now she thought the gaze of the calm Quaker ladies was reproachful.

"Mother! my mother!" she whispered softly, kissing her hand to the sunny face. "Mother, do you know how lonely your little girl is? Mother, can you see me? You look so happy, you can't be dead. Ah! but so far, so far from me!"

"Miss Regina, talking to yourself as usual," said a housemaid, whisking past with a dusting-brush, with which she was penetrating into every crevice of the carved balustrade, and flapping a duster as she withdrew it. "Talking to yourself; it's a bad habit, my dear; only mad folks do it."

Regina coloured crimson but vouchsafed no reply. She retreated to her own domain, where Puck was awaiting her. She climbed to her window-seat, and Puck took a flying leap to her lap, turning round and round till he had settled himself for a nap.

"Mad folks talk to themselves! Do they, I wonder? How rude it was of Susan to say that! Mad! people that don't know what they say or do. Such nonsense! But I wish Susan had not said it."

A long brown study followed; then Regina woke from it, to the reality that the large hands of the clock on St. Michael's Tower pointed to half-past eleven, and that her guests would be there at twelve. She had forgotten all about it. Fortunately Nurse was not so oblivious. She appeared with a jug of hot water and summoned Regina to the nursery. There on the bed lay the little check silk frock, and a clean pair of white stockings, a new pair of bright leather shoes with straps, and a black stuff apron with a bib which fastened across the shoulders.

"Not the apron, Nurse; I don't want the apron! And, oh dear! this clean frill is so prickly," she said, putting her fingers between her slender little throat and the newly crimped muslin frill. "No, not the apron."

"Well, then, promise you'll not nurse Puck on this pretty frock."

"It's not pretty," said Richenda; "it is—well, it's somehow not a bit like"——

"Like the little Miss Stuarts! No, it's not, and a good thing too. I can't abide dressed-up children aping grown-up airs. Now go and watch at the window for the carriage; it will be here directly."

As Regina passed the looking-glass she gave a parting glance at herself. The delicate skin of her arched throat was chafed by the stiff frill, and a little red mark was visible, but it was fair and white. She saw the reflection of a very old-fashioned little girl, and sighed. She need not have sighed. If beauty were of great importance, she had the promise of it. The large eyes were dim and dreamy, and kindling with emotion and interest; the delicate drooping lids with their curled fringes, the soft dark hair, which, though cropped short, took waves which would not be repressed, one of which Nurse called a "feather," shadowed her forehead on one side, which relieved the close straight contour of the smooth short hair on the other. Another of these soft rings curled above a small delicate ear, which was pink and white, like a shell on the Normouth sands.

But Regina herself saw none of the things I describe. She saw only the reflection of a very old-fashioned little girl, who had just realised the fact by contrasting her appearance with that of the "little Miss Stuarts."

The sound of carriage-wheels and the sudden cessation before the large hall-door announced the arrival of the children from Barrow, and Regina went to the top of the staircase to receive them, Puck following.

"I don't know what I shall do with them," Regina thought as she demurely returned Bertha and Agnes Stuart's greeting. "They will think it so dull;" and then she was conscious of a thrill of disappointment. Rex had not arrived with his sisters.

"Rex is coming up to St. Michael's to tea," Agnes said, interpreting her look; "but he thought he would not come with us to-day. As there are no boys, it would be rather slow for him. He wanted to stay with Hamish and look over the lessons we have got to prepare for old Goodye. Isn't that a capital name for him,—our tutor, you know?"

"I never saw him," Regina replied, "so I can't tell. Will you take off your things here?" Regina said, leading the way to the nursery.

"What a jolly large room!" Bertha exclaimed.
"Who sleeps there in the big bed?"

"Nurse," was the reply.

"Dear me! I wonder you don't like a room to yourself. Agnes and I have a separate room now, though we had to put up with the same at Cheltenham. What a sweet little dog! I don't mean Puck—I don't care for him—but that little smooth china dog on the chimney-piece. What a quantity of funny things you have got there!"

"I had them all years ago. Nurse takes care of them, because I used to play with them and pretend it was Wombwell's Menagerie."

"How funny! This little dog with the curled-up tail is perfect. And there's your old doll's house; and what a nice boat!"

There was no lack of amusement for Agnes and Bertha. They made everything their own, and the schoolroom went through the same scrutiny as the two nurseries had done.

Regina had very little to do but answer questions and admire her guests' appearance. They wore white frocks to-day with blue round spots, with wide pale blue sashes, and soft lace was gathered at the neck and wrists. Agnes wore a bracelet of plaited hair with a heart hanging to it, and both the sisters had a chain and a watch, and some trinkets hanging at one end.

Agnes had worn a ring, but this her mother had steadily refused to allow, although the gift of her dearest friend, Katie Smith; but she did not fail to tell Regina that she possessed it, and "hundreds" of other lovely things which had belonged to her own mother.

Regina could not have believed so much information could be got through in the short space of an hour. Agnes delighted in talking about herself and her own concerns, and as Bertha had subsided with a book in an arm-chair, Agnes had it all her own way.

She chattered in an unbroken stream about the Smiths, and Roland, and Katie, and about the tears which had been shed when they parted; that Katie was going to stay with her some day—perhaps in

the Christmas holidays—and then Regina would find out for herself how charming she was.

Regina proved such a good listener, and her dark eyes seemed by their expression to show so much interest in that most important person, Miss Agnes Stuart, that her heart was won. She repaid the attention by sundry little flattering speeches. She captured Regina's hand and held it in hers. She told her it was a beautiful shape, and that her eyelashes were the longest she had ever seen, and wished that her throat was so slender and graceful, and so white, except for the little red line the rough edge of the frill had left.

"You should have lace," she said; "it's so much nicer and softer. And is not that silk frock too hot for summer?"

- "I don't think it's too hot," said Regina faintly.
- "Muslins are so much nicer. We have three each; but, of course, you could have a dozen muslin dresses if you chose, as you are an heiress."
 - "I don't think I am an heiress."
- "Why, of course you are. You are to have an enormous fortune when you grow up."
- "I am sure I don't care about it," said Regina; "I shan't know what to do with it. Have you heard any news about the poor little boy your brother saved?"
 - "No! I daresay he has toppled into the water

again; and this time there was no Rex to fish him out."

Here Nurse appeared.

"The bell will ring directly, Miss Regina, my dear. Here's your apron."

Poor Regina submitted to be encased in the black apron, and Bertha, laying down her book, sprang up, and the three children went down to dinner, Agnes with her arm round Regina's waist, and Bertha a little behind.

Agnes had already appropriated Regina as her particular property, and no reference was made to their previous meeting, when Regina had tried to escape from observation, and Agnes had made her way through long grass and bracken to secure her, an unwilling guest, at Barrow Court.

In spite of Agnes's soft speeches and caressing ways, Regina found herself saying continually, "I wish Rex had come."

CHAPTER XIII.

STRAWBERRY GARDENS.

THERE was not much conversation at the early dinner. Mrs. Turnbull asked a few questions, but they did not invite much reply. Mr. Turnbull was away from home, so that his quiet smile was missed by Regina, who always felt when he was present that she had a friend at court.

Regina loved Mr. Turnbull, though she was afraid to approach him with any demonstration of affection, as she often longed to do.

Mrs. Turnbull was one of those very good and excellent people who do not give themselves any trouble to be pleasant or agreeable. She was sincere and true, and did her duty towards those around her.

This afternoon at St. Michael's she looked upon as something to be got through; but children, and grown-up people also, very soon discover when the pleasure which is given is no pleasure to the giver, that what is done is simply done as something to be got through, and that a sense of relief will follow when the whole thing is accomplished. There is to such people no pleasure in the "doing," only satisfaction in the "done."

Hence it was that there was a flatness about the drive to St. Michael's Mount. Mrs. Turnbull leaned back in the large open phaeton with its drab cloth lining, and was going over in her mind the contents of the hamper which was on the box by the coachman. She had calculated with great precision the number of rolls and cakes which were necessary, and she was thinking what would be the expense of the picnic, at so much a head for the tea and strawberries and cream at St. Michael's Mount.

Agnes and Regina sat opposite Mrs. Turnbull on the narrow seat with its upright back; for in the phaetons of those days there was no room to lounge, as in the luxurious open carriages of the present time.

Agnes had slipped her hand into Regina's, and was full of a somewhat gushing affection for her, and anxious to secure her as a friend.

This was so new to Regina that she met all the demonstrations with a mixture of shyness and pleasure. All her little lonely heart seemed ready to go out to the young girl who so unexpectedly had chosen her to be her friend.

As soon as they arrived at St. Michael's Mount.

Agnes, still retaining her hold on Regina's arm, led her away into the wood, and then said—

"We'll have a nice long talk. We don't want Bertha or Rex. Oh," she said, peeping out of a little square window in the summer-house where they were seated, "there Rex comes scampering up the drive to the house. Take care they don't see us."

"But will they not think it rude to leave them—for me to leave them, you know?"

"Oh, very well. Pray, don't stay with me if you don't wish."

"Yes, I do wish to stay very much, only I don't want to be rude to your brother and sister."

"You dear little old-fashioned thing! Fancy your being only eleven!"

"I shall be twelve in September."

"Oh, well, you are the oldest, and yet the youngest girl I ever knew. You know Rex said the first day we saw you, you were quite lovely; and then I did not know whether I thought so, but now I see exactly what he means,—that you look like your name—a queen. Do you remember how you stood in the park the day that child fell into the river, and how I tried to pull you out of hiding, and how angry you were?"

"It was very silly of me; but I have never known any children of my own age, and I felt afraid of you."

"Dear me, how amusing! But you will never be

afraid of me again;" and then there was another kiss; and then Agnes talked about herself and all she did, and Regina listened and was interested, and thought she would write it all in a copybook, and make one of her stories out of it.

"You know," Agnes said, "Katie Smith keeps a journal, writes down every day what happens. Let us, you and I, keep a journal, and show it to each other. Won't that be fun?"

Anything like "writing" was full of attraction to Regina, but she was doubtful about showing what she wrote to Agnes.

"I don't think I have anything to write about very particular," she said, "my days are so much alike—Miss Baker, Monsieur de Vallerie, and Miss Baker again."

"Oh, but you can write what you feel and think," said Agnes.

"If I did, I should not like to show it."

"No, not to every one; but to me, because we are friends, you know."

Agnes was again giving Regina a rapturous hug when steps were heard, and Rex and Bertha rushed in.

"You are to come down directly. Mr. Goodwin is there, and his blind daughter, and Mrs. Turnbull is very angry with you for hiding," Bertha exclaimed; and Rex added—

"Yes, do come, Agnes. It is very rude to run away like this; no wonder Mrs. Turnbull is put out; and we are all going to the strawberry beds, and tea is to be set out in one of the arbours there."

"How rural!" exclaimed Agnes. "We are coming. Don't be so impatient."

"Oh, I must really go," Regina exclaimed. "I must indeed."

"That is so like Agnes, to make a hot friendship, and try to keep you all to herself. You must not trust Agnes," said Bertha.

"Come now," Rex exclaimed, "it is not fair to say that;" for Agnes coloured with vexation. "Let us forget everything but the strawberries now. I never saw such big ones."

"You greedy boy!" exclaimed Bertha. "I hope you are not going to keep them all to yourself."

The St. Michael strawberry beds were celebrated. They were raised in high banks with a path between, and straw was laid under the plants to receive any fruit that might happen to fall. There were two or three summer-houses with tables and chairs, and in one of these Mrs. Turnbull was already seated behind a very large teapot and a huge jug of rich cream, with the cakes, which had been unpacked, and a large basin of the powdered sugar, without which Agnes had said she could not eat strawberries.

Mr. and Miss Goodwin were with her, and

were invited to join the tea-party, though it had been an accidental meeting.

St. Michael's Mount was in Mr. Goodwin's parish, and he had walked up through the woods with his daughter to visit a sick woman in a cottage near.

The young people had very soon gathered an immense pile of strawberries, and Regina was rather surprised to see that Agnes, who had spoken so disparagingly of the expedition, was certainly the keenest in appropriating the largest and finest strawberries to her share. Mr. Goodwin watched the operation with much amusement, while his daughter, leaning on his arm, stood on the top of one of the banks.

Presently Regina came shyly towards them with a leaf of very fine beautiful strawberries in her hand.

- "Will you have these?" she asked in a low voice.
 - "What is it? I can't see, you know."
- "Some strawberries," Regina said. "I thought you would like some before we sat down to tea; we are all eating them."
- "How very kind of you!" Miss Goodwin said, extending her small delicate hand in the direction of the leaf.
- "Is this one of the Miss Stuarts, papa?" she asked.
 - "No," said Mr. Goodwin, "it is Miss Turnbull."

Regina corrected him instantly. "Oh, no; I am Regina Randall. I am not"——

"Of course," Mr. Goodwin said. "I beg your pardon."

"Not one of your pupils then, papa?"

"No, I am sorry to say she is not. I rather think I should like to have her to teach and to scold."

"I don't think you would," Regina said seriously; "at least I am sure Miss Baker and M. de Vallerie don't like it."

"Tastes differ, you know," Mr. Goodwin said with a smile. "Ada agrees to that."

"Oh, yes! happily for us all," she replied with a merry laugh. "Thank you so much for the strawberries. Now will you let me put my hand in your arm and walk with you till tea is ready?"

Regina was delighted, and Miss Goodwin put her disengaged hand gently over her face, saying—

"It is my only way of knowing what you are like. I am quite blind for all useful purposes; that is, I see no object, though there is a light before me, not total darkness."

"Did you ever see anything?" Regina ventured to ask.

"I have a dream that I did see a very bright face with gold-coloured hair on which the sun shone. I can call it back now, and with it a dim memory of blue hyacinths in a wood; but it is very long ago."

- "Like my"—— Regina stopped; she felt her hand pressed gently.
 - "Like your what?"
- "My memories of my father; they seem like a dream now, it is so long ago."

Miss Goodwin laughed a low sweet laugh.

- "Ah! and you are a little girl, and I am nearly thirty; my 'long ago' is so much longer ago than yours."
- "Whose face do you remember—that bright face you spoke of?"
- "It was my brother's. He lived to be our pride and joy. When blindness fell on me, he was my eyes. He was noble, and good, and true. God took him from us three years ago. My father and mother cannot even now speak of him, but I love to speak of him and to feel him near."
 - "Was he ill a long time?" Regina asked.
- "He had no illness. He died in his brave efforts to save a friend from drowning. Some day I will tell you more, not now."
- "Why, then, he must have been like Rex," Regina exclaimed.
- "Who is Rex? I did not know I was in such royal company," Miss Goodwin said, with another low, sweet laugh.
- "Rex Stuart. He is one of Mr. Goodwin's pupils."

- "I remember now; but I thought he was lame."
- "Oh, no! that is Hamish; and"-
- "How long are you going to keep us waiting, Regina? Tea is quite ready."

The voice was Agnes's. She had been jealously watching Regina's confidential talk with Miss Goodwin. Agnes always tried to keep what she liked to herself; and having, as she believed, won Regina's confidence by her professions of affection, it vexed her to see that she could, even for five minutes, prefer Miss Goodwin's company to hers.

"I hope you will come and see us at the Rectory some day," Miss Goodwin said as they came within hearing of the rest of the party.

"I should like to come very much, if you will ask Mrs. Turnbull's leave."

The tea, with all its excellent accompaniments of cakes, cream, and strawberries, was highly appreciated. Agnes forgot to be grand, and made no remarks on the rough table and the cobwebs on the roof of the little hut; and Bertha forgot to say sharp things to Rex, while Rex's face beamed with enjoyment; and Mr. Goodwin, looking at him, saw again before him the face of another bright laughing boy hidden now from his sight for ever; and Mrs. Turnbull, pleased and satisfied with all her arrangements, decided that no plan could have been devised which would have answered better in every way.

The carriage deposited Agnes, Bertha, and Rex at Barrow Court about eight o'clock, and then a silent drive in the deepening twilight of the summer evening gave Regina time to think over the daya day marked in her child life in red letters-a day which had proved so different to what she had expected. Agnes Stuart telling her she loved her and admired her-Agnes, whom she thought had looked down on her. Then Miss Goodwin's sweet voice and kindly pressure of her hand. It was all very nice and pleasant. Generally, when driving with Mrs. Turnbull, Regina would be holding imaginary conversations with her imaginary friends-"her Grants and her Jacksons"-but to-night her world was peopled with the real instead of the ideal, and there was no mistaking the reality of Miss Goodwin's invitation to St. Michael's Rectory, nor Agnes's repeated expressions of affection.

There was no doubt in her mind as to whether Agnes really cared for her. She accepted at once what she had often hungered for, and rehearsed all that had passed. Her cheeks flushed with excitement, and her dark eyes glistening with a new delight.

Life would be different indeed with love to sweeten it; and Regina, with all the earnestness of her nature, took many an inward vow always to be faithful to Agnes and never give her up. Mrs. Turnbull's voice awakened her from her dream.

"The Miss Stuarts are very independent children, and express their opinions too freely, I think. I overheard some remarks which did not please me, and I do not desire any great intimacy between you and them, Richenda. You are invited to the Court next week, when Mr. Turnbull and I propose taking a tour to Scotland and the English Lakes."

"Oh, let me go! pray let me go!"

"I have not decided," was the calm reply. "If it is convenient, I may accept the invitation; but I may make other arrangements. I shall consider about it."

And with this uncertain answer Regina was obliged to rest content.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LETTER.

That bright day at the strawberry gardens was the last for some time. The weather took one of those sudden changes with which we are all familiar in our English climate. Rain fell incessantly, a chill persistent rain, and Regina was left very much to her own devices in her own room in the Bank-house. After the glimpse she had enjoyed of another life, a life of companionship and sympathy, the long lonely hours seemed longer and more lonely than before. Puck could do everything but talk, it is true; but with the best intentions Puck could only be Puck.

It was more difficult now than in past days to summon her imaginary friends. After Agnes Stuart's endearments, Hamish's quick interest in what she told him, Miss Goodwin's ready response to her timid overtures of friendship, it was decidedly flat to have to do the talking on both sides with her shadowy world of friends.

Writing was tried, but somehow inspiration did not come, and a good many leaves of copybooks were consigned to Nurse's waste-paper bag as worthless.

Regina was fast returning to her self-absorbed life, and the dreamy condition was not likely to fit her for the requirements of the world when at last she had to meet them, as meet them she must some day.

There had not been a break in the clouds for three days, and now, on the evening of the fourth, there was a slight sign of clearance, and the patter of the rain against the window and the drip from the spouts ceased. Light broke in the western sky, and a faint gleam of sickly sunshine caught the roof of the opposite houses and touched the face of the clock on St. Michael's Church.

Nurse came in with the tea-tray, and, wonderful to say, a letter—a very big letter too, addressed to "Miss Randall, Bank House, Norminster."

I daresay the children who read my story have often received a letter. Aunts and uncles, godmothers and brothers at school, mothers during a temporary absence, little friends or cousins, may all have written to them. Thus they can hardly enter into the surprise and joy, which was almost painful, with which Regina exclaimed, "A letter for me!"

"Yes! I found it on the table in the hall, with some for Mrs. Turnbull. She is out, so I brought it to you, for I thought it might wake you up a bit; you have been so dull since the rain set in. But the glass is rising and the wind is changed. Rowley says it will be fine to-morrow. Well, are you going to open your letter?" for Nurse's curiosity was roused. "Who is it from?"

Regina was slowly, very slowly, unfastening the envelope, and taking out a thick packet of six closely written sheets of notepaper. I wish I could add well written also; but truth compels me to say the thin, pinched writing left very much to be desired in form and appearance, and was by no means easy to decipher.

The letter was, as you will guess, from Agnes Stuart, and though so interesting to her, I do not think it is worth repeating word for word. It began with—"My very dearest Regina," and had sundry allusions to Rex being very disagreeable and Bertha most unsympathetic. The last word was left to imagination to make out, for it had an extraordinary vagueness about its spelling, which baffled Regina for some time.

"We agreed to write a journal; how far have you got in yours? I am half way through my first book. When this horrid rain stops, then you will come here. Could you ask Mrs. Turnbull for me to come to you alone, without the others, just as your particular friend? There is some secret between mamma and Mrs. Turnbull. I have seen two or three letters, and there is one going to the post to-day with mine.—Your truly attached and affectionate

"Well, that is a letter," said Nurse at last, who had been scanning Regina's face as she read it between sips of tea and bites of thick bread-and-butter. "I can't think what ever any mortal can find to say to spread over all these sheets."

"It is very interesting," Regina said promptly, putting the letter in her pocket for future reading when Nurse's eyes were directed elsewhere.

Nurse was diverted by the sound of a carriage stopping in the street below, and going to the window said, "There's Dr. Harrison again."

"Who is he come to see?" Regina asked.

"My dear, I wonder you ask; it's as plain as a pikestaff;" an expression which Nurse always used with emphasis. "Yes, it's as plain as a pikestaff that Mr. Turnbull is very ill. Its cough, cough, half the night."

"Mr. Turnbull! Cousin Andrew!" Regina exclaimed. "He has got a cough, but he is not ill.

People that are ill don't go out and don't sit in the Bank."

"That depends!" said Nurse. "Some folks hold on till they drop, others cry wolf for a pin-prick. Mr. Turnbull is very much out of health, and its my belief, unless he gives up in time—well, it will be a giving up for good. There's consumption in the family, we all know. His sister died of decline, and so did your dear mamma, who was his first cousin, and your papa's second cousin once removed on the mother's side."

This tangle of relationship always puzzled Regina as much as a sum, and she gave up all attempts to unravel it. But Nurse's remarks had set a new train of thought, as it were, on fire, and she began to reproach herself for never seeing what Nurse said was as "plain as a pikestaff."

Regina always went down in the evening to the drawing-room, an hour of penance to her, when she was obliged to sit and hem a pocket-handker-chief or a pinafore for Mrs. Turnbull's missionary basket, or worse, far worse, practise the mystery of knitting.

The knitting with sticky cotton on small needles, the dropped stitches, the slow progress, was torture to Regina. Mrs. Turnbull had herself learned to knit with cotton on small needles, and Regina must do the same, though larger needles and nice

soft wool would have been much easier to accomplish.

This evening, when Regina's hair had been smoothed by Nurse and her pinafore removed—for Regina, although eleven years old, wore the real "pin-before," tied at the back with three tape bows—she took her workbag, and after kissing Puck and bidding him good-bye at the top of the backstairs, as was her invariable custom, she went to the drawing-room.

To her surprise it was empty, and Regina laid down her workbag, and took out her letter to read it again.

This occupation engrossed her so entirely, that Mrs. Turnbull was in the room and close to her before she heard her footstep.

- "What are you reading, Regina?"
- "A letter."
- "A letter! and pray from whom? I can allow of no correspondence without my leave. How did the letter reach you?"
- "By post," said poor Regina, trembling with agitation. "Nurse found it on the table in the hall and brought it up to me."
- "It was extremely wrong of Nurse. Give me the letter."

But Regina held it in a tight grasp. "Pray do not ask to see it, Cousin Mary. Agnes would be so vexed."

"Agnes! Agnes Stuart! Give it to me this instant. Do you suppose, Richenda, that I can allow a secret correspondence in my house?"

"Oh, there is nothing—nothing in the letter that you would mind, Cousin Mary; only Agnes is so fond of me, she loves me, and—and I have so few to love me!"

Regina's voice broke down now in sobs, and hot tears poured down her face.

"Do not be so sentimental and ridiculous, Regina. This world is full of very heavy troubles, and it is a pity to see a little girl of eleven, with everything she wants, discontented and repining. Now give me Miss Stuart's letter."

"No, Cousin Mary, I can't give it to you."

"I shall not wrangle with you any longer, Regina. It is most unbecoming, knowing, as you must know, how anxious I am about Mr. Turnbull, and that Dr. Harrison thinks very badly of his state of health. I consider you not only disobedient, but heartless and cruel."

There was unmistakably a ring of real emotion in Mrs. Turnbull's voice, and Regina began to feel herself to be what she called her. To appeal to her sympathy and her affection was the sure road to win her. It was a pity that Mrs. Turnbull had not sooner discovered it.

"I am very sorry about Cousin Andrew indeed.

I never knew he was ill; but," choking back her tears, "I am sure Agnes would not like her letter to be—to be laughed at; and I dare not show it—it wouldn't be right."

"It is for me to decide that point, not for a little girl of your age. Now, Regina, give me the letter."

"Oh, I wish I knew what was right," the child exclaimed passionately. "I do wish I knew." And then with a desperate effort she held the letter out to Mrs. Turnbull and was running from the room, when Mrs. Turnbull called—

"Stay where you are, Regina; take your knitting and be quiet."

Regina obeyed. How terrible it was to her to watch Mrs. Turnbull's face as she read the letter; her smile of contempt at one part, her frown at another! She murmured, "It is ridiculous! most improper!" and the like.

At last the letter was finished, the six small sheets had been deciphered. Mrs. Turnbull quietly went to her writing-table, and putting the letter in one of the small drawers there, locked it, and making no further comment, left the room.

Presently a slow step was heard in the wide corridor leading to the drawing-room, accompanied by a little quick cough, and Mr. Turnbull came in.

"Well, Regina, all alone—crying too? Why, what is the matter?"

Fast and faster the big tears fell upon the piece of knitting in her hand. The movement of the stubborn needles under the shower became altogether impossible.

"Come here," Mr. Turnbull said, as he sank into his chair. "Come here."

Regina needed no second bidding; she threw down the hateful knitting and went to her cousin. He took her on his knee and kissed her tenderly.

"Poor little girl! Well, perhaps it will be a good thing for you if my illness sends you where you will have companions and friends."

Regina looked up inquiringly.

"I don't understand," she said. "Are you very ill, Cousin Andrew?"

"My dear, the doctors say I must give up work for a year and go abroad. We are planning to let Mr. Mortimer, the senior clerk, live in the house while I am away, and you—I don't suppose there is any harm in telling you—you are to live at Barrow Court for a year with Lady Stuart. She has written to Sir Montague about it, and until she receives his reply she cannot quite decide; but that is our present intention. If there is any difficulty, you must go to school."

"Oh, I shall like to go to Barrow very much, and I should hate school. But, Cousin Andrew, are you very ill? I am so sorry."

"It's this cough, my dear, that makes me weak and good for nothing. I don't like being sent away from home and work. It's a trial to me, Richenda; but, my dear, this world is full of trials, and we must bear them cheerfully. You are a good, quiet little thing," he said; "and I wish we had made a happier home for you; but brighter days are coming for you, that's a comfort to me to think of. There! go and sit down," for Mrs. Turnbull was heard returning.

Regina re-seated herself with a throng of new emotions within her heart.

Cousin Andrew was so kind, it was dreadful to be glad he was ill, if that was to be the means of her going to Barrow. To live at Barrow, to be taught by Mr. Goodwin, to escape from poor Miss Baker and her sighs, to be in the country always, and to be near Agnes! It was a strange mixture of feelings which Richenda had to sort into their proper places. "Analyse," we call it; but that is a hard word, and may not convey much meaning to some who are following Regina's story.

It was a little sorrow there, a little joy here, a little self-love there, and self-satisfaction that she should be within reach of Agnes, who told her so many pleasant things about herself.

But Mrs. Turnbull's voice upset all this fine arrangement of thought and motive.

"My dear Regina, it is time for you to go to bed. Come and say good-night."

Mr. Turnbull's kiss was more than usually affectionate, Mrs. Turnbull's more than usually cold. But nothing was said about the letter; and as Regina rejoined Puck, who was seated at the top of the stairs waiting for her, she exclaimed, "I have lost the letter, Puck, but I have found out the secret."

CHAPTER XV.

TIM.

"I SAY, Amos, stop that pole and up with the sail; there's a puff of wind now."

Amos, quick and handy, did as he was bid; and Luke Jones, seated at the helm with a short pipe in his mouth as usual—for he was never seen without it—called again—

- "Amos, how's my little chap a getting on?"
- "Very so-so," was the short reply.
- "What ails him, lad?"
- "It's the rheumatics, I think; he screeches when he's touched, and he's blazing hot. I wish you'd let me carry him to the hospital."

The very name of hospital infuriated Luke Jones.

- "I won't, there!" and more words, which, like the short clay pipe, were always on Luke's lips. "No hospital for me or mine, with their cant."
- "Well," said Amos sharply, "the child's pining away. Susan says it's breaking her heart to see him."

"He ain't her child; she may keep her heart whole, for all I care. He ought to be brought aloft; you smother him down there." And signing to Amos to take the rudder, Luke lurched down the few steps which led below, stooping as he did so, or he would have knocked his head.

His little son lay in the locker on the bed Susan had prepared for him. It was some weeks now since he had fallen into the water, but he did not get any better. In fact, a sharp attack of rheumatic fever had seized that little thin form, and he had been racked with pain and consumed with fever alternately ever since.

The week of pouring rain which Regina had found so irksome at the top of the Bank-house had been a suffering one to little Tim, and the rheumatic pains in his legs and arms, which had moderated a little, returned with greater force.

Many a night when Luke was snoring heavily, Amos was sitting with the boy in his arms, rocking him to and fro as a mother would rock her suffering child. All his spare pence, and they were not many, went in buying Tim oranges and lemons. Amos had heard in the hospital that lemon-juice was good for rheumatism, and he brought a lemon from the stores whenever the barge put in at Norminster or Normouth. They lay heaped up on a shelf, for

TIM. 135

Tim did not take to them as kindly as Amos wished.

On a peg before him within sight, was the suit of blue serge with brass buttons which Amos had bought for him third-hand at the slopshop. That suit was the pride of little Tim's eyes, and before him lay a dim prospect of a day, distant, but to come at last, when he should put on that suit and walk by Amos's side to church. In that hope poor little Tim lived, and Susan's shake of her head and Amos's sighs did not discourage him.

The little heart lived on the hope of wearing the blue suit with the brass buttons; which had experienced many descents in the social scale since it was new and spotless, and worn by a fair-haired boy, who, daintily attired in shining boots, gloves, and white straw hat, had driven along the esplanade at Normouth with his mother.

"Hullo, Tim, my son!" was Luke's greeting, "how's yourself to-day?"

"Better, father," said little Tim; he always said he was better.

"Thought so! Stuff and nonsense that fellow Amos saying you arn't, just to aggravate me. You want a little speerit and water, Tim."

This invariable prescription from his father always met with the same answer—

"Oh, no, father, no; I can't take it."

"Another of Amos's teachings; he's drunk a sight of rum in his time, my boy."

"Father," said Tim in a low whisper, putting out one little thin arm, and curling round his father's neck, "I wish you'd do as Amos has done, and never touch a drop more of drink."

"Phew! what's a little chap like you to do with it?"

"Take me in your arms, father; I like it."

Luke Jones obeyed, and poor Tim nestled close to him. The very act seemed to wake a thrill of paternal love in Luke's heart.

"You don't hate your poor old Dad-eh, Tim?"

"I love you," was the faint reply, "and I want you to be very good."

"You don't want to go to that big hospital, do you, boy?"

Tim started up.

"No, oh no! I don't want to leave Amos, and you, and Sue."

"You shan't go neither; you'll bide along with me and get well and hearty."

Poor little Tim gave a long sigh.

"I wish I had not got this pain every night," he said; "it's a gnawing pain, and when I'm asleep I feel it all the time. How long will it last, Daddie?"

Luke was puzzled how to reply to this question.

"Oh, not long. Don't you fret."

Tim sank into an uneasy sleep, and his father feared to wake him. Through the dense cloud of ignorance which no one had taken pains to disperse a ray of light, faint but real, began to gleam. Luke began to doubt himself a little. He knew well enough the roll off the barge into the river had caused the child's suffering; and if he had not been drunk, or "half seas over," as he called it, he would not have given that rough push to the child "for nothing." He had half a mind to give up drink, and yet how should he find courage to do so?

Now it happened that the "Sarah Anne" stopped at the landing-place by Barrow this afternoon. A barrel of potatoes had to be deposited there from Normouth, and Amos, bringing-to the barge, gave a low whistle between his fingers to let Luke know, for he was always touchy on the subject of receiving money, and liked no one to do so but himself.

He was about to lay Tim back on the locker, thinking he was asleep, when the child opened his eyes.

"Take me aloft, Daddie; I'd like to go."

Luke stumbled up the stair with the boy in his arms, and found Amos with the barrel all ready, but no one at the landing-stage to receive it.

"Wait a bit," Amos said; "I'll haul it ashore and tell you boy to keep an eye on it. It's too big to make off with."

"I ain't going to leave goods like that. We must carry it on to Norminster, and they must pay extra freight."

Presently a voice on the bank called out, "How's the little fellow who had the ducking?" and Rex Stuart lay down his fishing-rod and came alongside of the "Sarah Anne."

"He's very bad, your honour," said Amos. "Will you step aboard and see him?"

Rex took a flying leap from the narrow landingstage and went up to Tim, whose father had laid him down on a heap of sacks, covered with an old coat.

"Why, he looks very ill," Rex exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"Rheumatics, sir, and a fever."

Tim was now quite roused from his fitful sleep, and opening his dark eyes wide he recognised Rex at once. He put out a thin little hand to him and said—

"I am glad I've found you. I've watched and watched for you, and you never came."

"I say," exclaimed Rex, "he ought to have a doctor. Wait a minute, for I see my mother. I'll call her."

And Rex went to the landing-stage, where the owner of the barrel, who had arrived, was haggling with Luke Jones about the carriage, and waved and

gesticulated to Lady Stuart, who was walking across the field towards the road with Agnes.

"What does Rex want?" Lady Stuart said, turning to go back to the river. "What is the matter, Rex?"

"Come here!" Rex shouted. "I have found the little boy again."

For a moment Lady Stuart could not recall what little boy; but Rex had made his way past the potato barrel and its owner, that had blocked the passage from the barge, and running up to his mother said—

"Do come, for I think the poor little chap is dying."

"Dying!" exclaimed Agnes. "How dreadful! Oh, don't go, mamma! come away. I am sure I dare not go. You are never going on the barge, where those rough men are standing? Pray don't, mamma. Bargees are so"——

But Agnes spoke to the air; Lady Stuart and Rex were already on board the "Sarah Anne."

Certainly Luke Jones was not an attractivelooking personage, with his reddish-purple face, his rough beard, and his swaggering air. He looked defiantly as she stepped up to the place where Tim lay, and asked in an ungracious grumbling tone what she wanted.

"Can I be of any use to your little boy?" she

said, in that gentle voice which even Luke Jones could not resist. "Can I be of any use? He looks so very ill. Has he had a doctor?"

"No, he don't want a doctor; it's nothing but rheumatics. I've had pinches of 'em scores and scores of times."

Lady Stuart had seated herself on the empty barrel turned upside down which was the only available seat, and lifted poor Tim in her lap, stroking his hair from his forehead, and touching him with that motherly hand which is so sweet in illness.

Amos drew near, and touching his cap, said-

"Beg your pardon, ma'am, but he does want a doctor. He's very bad; he's nought but skin and bone."

"Of course he must have a doctor. Shall I run and find Mr. Barnes, mother?"

"Wait a little, Rex, and I will consider what is best to do." Then turning to Luke she said, "Have you not thought of the hospital for the child? He needs careful nursing, I am sure."

"No child of mine shall darken the doors of a hospital. One of my mates was killed there, and I ain't a going to send my poor innocent brat to be killed."

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Amos, "but my mate has got a terrible spite at the hospitals; but

TIM. 141

I've cause to bless 'em. I was in, more than fifteen months, on an' off, with my arm."

All this time Tim had been gazing with wistful eye at Rex. The sight of his fair boyish face seemed to bring back as in a dream that plunge into the dark waters and the rescue which followed.

"When is the barge coming back?" asked Lady Stuart.

"We'll be down with the tide to-morrow morning, ma'am," said Amos.

"Well, stop here on the way, and I will try to make some arrangement for the child. You know," Lady Stuart said, speaking very slowly and gently, "it is quite certain this dear little boy wants some attention. If you will trust him to my care tomorrow, I will do my best; and as you are so often passing Barrow, you can see him at any time you desire."

"I'd like to come along with you, ma'am," Tim murmured, "if father and Amos will let me."

"There! hark to that," said Amos; "hark to that, Luke."

But Luke's stolid face betrayed no sign of relenting.

"I shan't give him up," he said doggedly.

Amos here gave Rex a nudge and said-

- "I'll manage it, I'll tackle him?"
- "May I carry him downstairs?" Lady Stuart asked.

"Better let me, ma'am," said Amos. "Them stairs are such a queer lot."

Amos lifted his little friend as he spoke, and Lady Stuart followed.

It seemed to her, as it would to you or me, impossible that any one could breathe in the confined air of a barge cabin.

Tears filled her eyes as poor Tim was laid again on his bed. Thoughts of her own little ones came thronging to her maternal heart. Their comfort so great, their happy joyous life so bright. Even Hamish in his pain and suffering had everything done for him that love could devise. The sharp contrast between the lives of well-cared-for children in sickness, and that of little Tim, and thousands of others like him, struck her, as it must strike us all at times, most painfully.

The tears of pity fell on Tim's little face as she bent over him, saying—

"Dear child! I hope I shall be able to do something to make you better. Do you know when you are in pain that One who loves you is very near, and that He suffered bitter pain for you, so that He can understand exactly how you feel?"

Tim's heavy eyes flashed with a momentary brightness.

"Is that Him Amos tells of, is it—Him he heard of in the hospital?"

"Yes, that's it, my lad. This lady knows all about it; she'll tell you better than I can," said Amos.

"Then I'll come along with you to-morrow," Tim said, "but I'll come back to father and Amos when I am well. You see, there's nobody to clean up here nor cook, now I'm ill. Sue does her best, but she can't be here often, 'cause she has got her Grannie to mind. So of course I must come back," he repeated with a wise nod at Amos.

"How old is he?" Lady Stuart asked as she returned to Rex with Amos.

"Going in eight. Don't he talk like an old man? He's a wonder, ma'am; and it's my belief we shall lose him, though it would break my heart."

Lady Stuart could not say she was hopeful that Tim would be spared, so she was silent. And she and Rex left the barge to pursue its accustomed course to the old city wharf at Norminster.

This little glimpse of barge-life brought a thoughtful shadow over Rex's face.

"I say, mother, do you think that little chap will die?"

"He is very ill, Rex; but there is a wonderful tenacity of life in these little waifs and strays."

"What are you going to do about it?" Rex asked again.

"I am going to speak to Mrs. Gaze; she has no children, and I am in hopes she will consent to

let me have a room in her cottage for our little riverboy."

"I don't believe she will," said Rex; "she made such a fuss about it the day he was carried there."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Agnes, coming from the park gate, "what an immense time you have been! What have you been doing? I hope you have not caught any complaint in that dreadful stuffy place. I really was frightened when I saw you disappear in the lower regions of the barge. Mamma, do tell me, have you had Mrs. Turnbull's final answer, as she calls it? Is Regina to come here?"

"I will give you my final answer to-morrow, Agnes," said Lady Stuart as she turned into the gardener's cottage.

CHAPTER XVL

KIND DEEDS.

THE "Sarah Anne" lay to alongside of the Norminster wharf about six o'clock, and there was the usual bustle of unloading. Every step of the heavy feet overhead made poor little Tim shudder. pain had gone to his head now, brought on probably by the exposure on deck that afternoon. It is hard for us all to be ill and patient when we are ill. Young and old feel the cross of pain to be very heavy to bear. We toss from side to side of our beds; kind hands turn our pillows, lay cooling lotions on our hot temples, apply remedies, carefully exclude light from our aching eyes; and yet how often we are cross and irritable, and ungrateful for what is done We pity ourselves so much that we often forget to pity those who nurse us, and we refuse to be pleased, or grateful, or comforted.

I do not think I am painting an exaggerated picture when I say this. If you will think over your childish illnesses, I am sure you will agree

with me, as I think over my own, that patience and gratitude for all that is done, have not been as remarkable as they ought to have been in us.

In the days about which I am writing there were no hospitals for sick children. The idea of nursing them separately was then, if thought of at all, quite in its infancy. The children of the poor, like little Tim, were taken to the wards of hospitals, and often had to see and hear much that was painful in the sufferings of older patients. Now any child who is so minded may help to keep a cot for a sick child in one of the many hospitals, where the comfort and peculiar requirements of the little ones are well considered and provided for.

Amos felt very uneasy about his little friend that evening, and the more so as Luke Jones had resorted to his usual method for drowning care, and after the unloading process was over, had gone ashore to a public-house much frequented by bargemen, and had returned in a fierce state of contrariness and general unamiability.

Amos could not leave Tim alone with his father in that condition, or he would have gone into the city to look for a doctor and ask him for some medicine.

He had hoped the "Fanny" might have been coming up from Normouth, but there was nothing to be seen of her, and Amos would not enlist the sympathies of any of the noisy women who belonged to the other barges.

To his great relief, however, just as the cathedral bells were chiming ten, he saw a figure in the bright moonlight on the wharf which he knew to be Sue's. She gave a low whistle, which was a sign Amos understood, and he replied to it by another.

Susan had been for a "land day or two," as she called it, in the country, and was now staying with a relation who lived near the wharf.

"I expected to find the 'Fanny' here to-night," he said. "How's that, I wonder? There wasn't much of a load to bring, I daresay, for trade is slack. But I say, Sue, the little 'un is very bad. Will you bide with him a bit while I go up town to the chemist's shop?"

"I'll run to Dr. Moore's in Rose Lane; he's a good man, and he will give me something. I'll look at him first, however. Is he asleep?" she asked, pointing towards a figure stretched out in the fore part of the barge.

"Yes, asleep or drunk; he won't hear."

"I'll not be gone ten minutes," she said; "but I'd rather see the child first."

With one quick jump Susan was at Amos's side, and the next moment in the cabin.

Tim was moaning in an uneasy sleep, and restless and feverish. "The lady at the Court down at Barrow is going to take him in tow to-morrow—that is, if his father will let her; but I don't know how the wind will blow. It was pretty contrary this evening, and he vowed he'd keep the child where he was, and no mistake."

"He shan't do that," said Susan promptly; "I'll carry him off myself. If we don't make haste, Amos, there'll be nothing left to carry."

"I know it," said Amos sadly; "I know it. I can't bear to look at that blue suit he wanted to wear to church; I feel as if I must chuck it overboard."

"That would be a waste of good stuff," said Susan, in her downright practical way. "But I'm off to the doctor's. You watch for my coming back; I'll not be long."

Susan was true to her promise, and to the great relief of Amos was back again before the clock chimed three-quarters. And not alone! Dr. Moore never shirked his duty, and though he was very tired, for he had been out the whole day on his rounds, he came promptly with Susan to the wharf.

"It's only a bargee's child, sir," his servant had said, as he brought him his boots.

"Only a bargee's child! His life is of as much consequence, I suppose, as yours or mine."

Susan waited in the surgery. While asking a few rapid questions, Dr. Moore put into his bag what medicine he thought likely to be of use, and then set out with Susan.

"How's your grandmother," he asked, "and the brother I attended?"

"Fancy you remembering me like that, sir," said Susan. "They are nicely, thank you, sir, and I am glad to say Jack is all right as to the drink. He is a sober boy now, sir, thanks to you."

"Whose child am I going to see?" the doctor asked.

"Luke Jones's, sir, he that owns the 'Sarah Anne.' Poor child! there ain't much left of him, and if it had not been for Amos, he would have been dead long ago."

It did not require much professional sagacity to see that Susan was right, and Dr. Moore turned abruptly to Amos.

"He must be removed from this close, unwhole-some atmosphere," he said.

Amos nodded.

"There is no time to lose," Dr. Moore went on.
"Where can you take him?"

Then Amos told the story of Barrow Court as we know it, and how the young gent had saved Tim from drowning, and how the good lady there had promised to put Tim to bed in a house hard by the river, where he could look in on him as he passed any time.

"Well, I do not say that even this will save the child's life, but we must hope."

"Sir," said Amos, with a ring of almost agony in his voice, "don't say I'm a going to lose that little chap; it would go to break my heart."

"There, don't take on, Amos," said Susan. "Never say die, you know. Hope on, hope ever, them's my maxims."

"Then, sir," exclaimed Amos again, "what can we do with the governor, this little chap's father?"

"Where is he?" asked Dr. Moore, bending his head and taking two strides up the narrow creaking steps, glad to breathe the crisp night air after the close confined cabin. "Where is he?"

Amos pointed to the dark mass at the prow of the barge.

"That's he, sir. He's too far gone to talk to to-night. He's been ashore, sir, to the Maid's Head."

"Ah! drinking, I suppose. No, it's no use rousing him. What time do you start to-morrow?"

"Somewhere about eight o'clock, sir."

"Well, then, I'll be here by half-past seven. Give the child the medicine I have left below, and as soon as the sun is up bring him on deck. And, my good fellow, can't you clean up that place downstairs a bit? It is enough to make the well sick, and no sick person can possibly recover in such an air."

"Well, sir," said Amos, "the barges are mostly alike, and I think folks get used to them. Why, lor, sir, in the 'Betsy Jane,' Jim Crickman's boat, there's somewhere about half a dozen children all sleeping in the cabin, packed like the mackerel in the baskets."

Dr. Moore shrugged his shoulders, and saying good-night, stepped across the plank, and was soon out of sight.

"Well, I must go back to Aunt's," Susan said, following the doctor's example, "or she will have shut up house. I'll be here before sunset again to look after the poor little chap;" and then Susan disappeared.

Amos was left alone under the starlit sky, and the silence was unbroken except by the loud snores of Luke Jones. His heart was heavy, and tears dimmed his eyes and made the lamp by the old ferry-house look blurred and disturbed. He brushed away the tears again and again, and at last a broken sob escaped him.

"Don't take away little Tim; it's all I've got to love. I can't do without little Tim. I'm a sinful creature, O Lord! but don't go and punish me by taking away Tim. I don't mind about my arm now

-I've got used to it; but I'd never get used to do without Tim."

A faint cry from below of "Amos! O Amos!" roused him, and he was at the child's side in an instant.

"I am so hot, Amos. I'm so bad, and the pain's bad."

"There, there, my boy! I've got something good for you;" and Amos poured the draught out of the little bottle into a cracked blue cup with no handle, and raising Tim with an adroit movement of his shoulder, held it to the child's parched lips. He drank it eagerly, and then he asked Amos to nurse him, and through all the long hours the young man sat patiently with the boy upon his knees, and trying to sing in a voice which was not very musical, it is true, the first two lines of a hymn. Amos never could get beyond the first two, but he went over and over them to Tim's great content, for he dozed off into a sleep, less troubled and uneasy than he had known for some nights.

"Jesus, refuge of my soul,
To Thy sheltering arms I fly,
While the raging billows roll,
While the tempest still is high."

And that refuge of the weary and shelter of the homeless was very present in the cabin of the barge that night.

Mrs. Gaze was somewhat appalled at Lady Stuart's proposition, but Lady Stuart was always very successful in bringing people round to her wishes; so the little room was made ready for Jim, and Mrs. Gaze agreed to "make a trial" of it. She would not pledge herself for any time, and considered herself free at the end of a week to give her Ladyship warning that at the end of another week she should give up the charge.

"For really your Ladyship can't know what them barge children are. Their language is enough to make one shake in one's shoes; and as to their hugger-mugger way of life, it was not to be believed unless you saw it."

Lady Stuart felt all this to be very true, but she did not think she was the less responsible for Tim on that account. Rex had rescued the child from drowning, and ought not she to hold out a hand to rescue him from a deeper gulf than that of the river?

"When an opportunity of doing the least service is brought before me," Lady Stuart said, "I dare not turn from it. I did not seek for this barge child; he was, as it were, sent to me, and I must do all I can for his body, and, if he lives, do what I can for his soul."

If every one did the little which lies before them, instead of waiting for great things which are far

distant, how changed would be the face of this sad world of ours! Little passing deeds of love and kindness, of patience and forbearance, how beautiful they are! And they lie within the reach of us all, —wayside flowers which all may gather, if they are so disposed.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARITHMETIC.

LESSONS went on steadily in the schoolroom at Barrow Court, and for a time the novelty of a "tutor," and his great superiority over governesses, kept Agnes and Bertha attentive and industrious. Rex really worked, and though Mr. Goodwin too often had to return an exercise or cross a sum with two swift marks, Rex won his approval more and more.

Little as Mr. Goodwin said, he saw everything. No small act of unselfishness, no kindness to Hamish passed unnoticed. Agnes would have been as much surprised as Rex had she known how thoroughly Mr. Goodwin understood her. Vanity was Agnes's besetting sin. It was this vanity that made her so eager to flatter and be praised in return; it was vanity that often made her insincere, and sometimes, I fear, deceitful.

Bertha's bluntness and want of consideration for the feelings of others was less difficult to meet. "You know where to find Bertha," Hamish exclaimed on the morning which had seen Tim safely removed to the gardener's cottage. "You know where to find Bertha; but Agnes is like an eel; if you catch her by the tail, she wriggles round and slips off before you have time to think. That was a shabby trick she played off on you, Rex, about the essay on Tuesday."

Rex grew very red. "Oh, well, never mind; it's over now and done with. I'll just keep the key of my desk in my pocket, that's all."

Hamish murmured something which implied that he was not satisfied, when the door opened and both his sisters appeared, Mr. Goodwin behind them.

"The bargee child is all safe at Mrs. Gaze's, Rex, you'll be glad to hear," Bertha exclaimed.

"Yes; and he cried when he was put into the nice little bed. It's quite true what Mrs. Gaze says, that these sort of children 'thrive in dirt.'"

"Have you seen Tim, Mr. Goodwin?" Rex asked.

"Yes, I have just come up from the cottage with Lady Stuart. He is very ill; I doubt if he lives many days," was the answer; "but care and good nursing may do wonders. Now, let us begin our work at once, for it is late, I see;" and Mr. Goodwin laid his large old-fashioned gold watch on the table and drew Agnes's arithmetic book towards him.

"You have worked out the wrong proposition, Miss Agnes. It was Number 136, and this is Number 124."

"Yes," said Agnes with a sigh; "but I really am so very much behind the rest. You know I am so stupid at sums."

Mr. Goodwin said nothing when Agnes asserted her stupidity, or her dullness, or her carelessness. Mr. Goodwin had a provoking way of accepting it.

Hamish was sometimes heard to murmur, "Fishing for compliments;" but if such was really Agnes's intention, all I can say is, that the bait was not successful.

"I am so dull at sums," Agnes repeated. "I used to tell Mrs. Smith I did not know anything beyond that, two and two made"———

"These two sums, 124 and 125, are correct, and they are rather hard sums for a stupid young lady who has not got beyond 'twice two.' Miss Agnes, will you be so kind as to work out the two I marked, while I examine your sisters?"

"Oh, it will take me all the morning, I assure you, Mr. Goodwin; besides, it is our morning for 'Cæsar,' and I do so enjoy 'Cæsar' and all your interesting stories."

Mr. Goodwin had become apparently quite deaf, for he went on examining Bertha's and Rex's sums without another word. Then Hamish's turn came.

"You have only one error," Mr. Goodwin remarked.

"Miss Bertha and Rex are less successful; but I daresay there will soon be an improvement. Now for 'Cæsar.'"

Agnes was sitting with her book and slate before her (slates were used in those days in all schoolrooms), but not attempting to do her sums.

Still Mr. Goodwin took no notice, and not till Agnes drew her chair down to Bertha's to look over her "Cæsar" did Mr. Goodwin speak.

"You will be so kind as to work out those sums, Miss Agnes," he said. "We will not trouble you with Latin to-day."

"But I would much rather read with you, and besides these are such dreadfully hard sums."

"Not so difficult nearly as the two you showed me this morning, which were perfectly wrought out, and had no mistakes. These are comparatively easy."

A deep blush rose to Agnes's cheek, and Rex and Hamish exchanged glances which she knew were significant. But to remonstrate with Mr. Goodwin she felt to be hopeless, so she had to accommodate herself to circumstances with as good a grace as she could.

The morning's work went on, and just as Mr. Goodwin had marked off the lesson for the next time, Lady Stuart's gentle tap was heard at the door.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Queens do not generally ask leave to enter their own dominions," Mr. Goodwin said with a smile.

"But these are not my dominions in lesson-time," she answered. "I thought I should like to tell the children that a new pupil is expected. Regina Randall is to come to live with us for a few months. Mr. Turnbull is ordered by the doctors to give up his profession for at least a year and travel, and Regina is to be committed to my care."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Agnes; "she is my particular friend. I am glad it is decided; she is so clever."

"Poor thing! I pity her," murmured Hamish. While Bertha said, "I don't think she will be happy here; she is so odd and shy."

"We ought to make her happy," said Rex; "then she will get over her shyness,—a lonely girl like her with no one to care much about her."

"Is she to bring her Nurse with her?" asked Bertha. "She is such a baby! I believe she could not do without her. And Puck, — is Puck to come?"

"Of course; I could not separate such tried friends. Mr. Goodwin will, I hope, have a very attentive new pupil."

Lady Stuart wondered that her announcement

and the children's reception of it did not bring any remark from Mr. Goodwin. She had, it is true, talked over Regina's coming to Barrow with him several times, but still she thought it rather strange that he did not say a word.

After a minute's pause, Mr. Goodwin pushed back his chair, and saying it was late, asked Agnes if her sums were finished. One was finished, and was quite inaccurate. Mr. Goodwin scored it with a pencil, and saying, "You must do these sums before any other work is attempted," bade a hasty "Good morning" and left the room.

- "Something has put Mr. Goodwin out," Bertha said.
 - "I should think so," Hamish murmured.
- "He is a cross and spiteful old thing," Agnes began, but Lady Stuart interrupted her.
- "Do not speak so disrespectfully of Mr. Goodwin, Agnes; I cannot allow it. How is it that you did not prepare your arithmetic?"
- "I did; it's only a whim of his, just because he makes favourites."
- "Stop, Agnes! I feel sure Mr. Goodwin has some good reason for what he has ordered you to do. You must stay in the schoolroom this afternon till your task is finished. Put away the books now, for the dinner-bell will ring directly."
 - "How is Rex's river-child?" Hamish asked.

"He is very weak, and I think Dr. Moore hardly expects he will live, poor little boy!"

"And how did you manage Mrs. Gaze, mother?"
Rex asked. "I found her in such a fume and fuss
this morning. She said she would sooner have
taken in a water-rat than a bargee child."

"I wish I could see him," Hamish said. "Somehow I can't get the child out of my head."

"You need not wish to see him," Bertha exclaimed; "he is a fearful little object."

"O Bertha! how can you say so? His poor, little, pinched, wan face looks quite pretty on the pillow—the first time his head has ever touched a pillow. It is hard for us," Lady Stuart said, "to realise that."

"Yes," said Rex, in a low voice, "very hard; and we go on with our comfortable lives, and never so much as give the uncomfortable ones a thought. I do like that big fellow with the stiff arm, mother; he does seem to love little Tim, much more than his half-drunken father does."

Bunchie and Berry now came in with very clean holland pinafores to escort their mother down to dinner, and Nurse appeared to wheel Hamish's sofa into the nursery, which was connected with the schoolroom by a door leading across a narrow passage. Lady Stuart had contrived this communication in order that Hamish might more easily change from one room to another.

She was glad to see that since regular work had begun in the schoolroom. Hamish had decidedly improved in spirits, and the occupation was evidently good for him.

His drawing and painting were now a welcome recreation, and he had twice consented to be carried down to the garden, where he lay on a folding-chair for more than an hour. He even began to talk of crutches, and of helping himself with them. Indeed, brighter days seemed at hand for Hamish, and Lady Stuart felt repaid for much patience and forbearance.

Rex was snatching up Berry to carry him down on his back to dinner, when Lady Stuart reminded him that his hair was rough and his hands hardly as free from ink-spots as they ought to be; so Rex put Berry down to use his legs, and rushed upstairs to make himself tidy. As he was rushing down again, he heard Hamish call, "I say, Rex, there's something wrong about those sums, as there was about the essay last week. What a mean, sneaking thing it is for a girl to do! For my belief is, that she copied those sums out of yours and Bertha's books."

"It is too horrid to think of," was Rex's reply; "at least, one does not like to think it of one's own sister."

- "Let's watch her, and lay a trap."
- "No, I don't think I'd like to do that, Hamish."
- "She ought to be stopped, I say."
- "Yes, but a trap would be mean; just meeting meanness with meanness, do you see?"
- "Well, I'm up to her, and so is Mr. Goodwin, I am certain. I don't think we ought to stand it. And there is no telling what this poor Regina will suffer."
- "Oh, Agnes is her dearest friend: she will be all right."
- "Dearest friend! how long will that last?" said Hamish scornfully. "You are very provoking, Rex, good as you may be. A spice of wickedness would be a refreshment."

Rex went whistling downstairs, and passed one of the servants with the tray bearing Hamish's dinner. In the hall he met Bunchie, who was on her way to summon him.

"The beef is quite cold, Rex, and you are to come directly. And," as he took her up in his arms, "there's a big letter for Agnes—very big—and she's put it in her pocket, she has. Mother said we must not read letters at dinner—she did."

CHAPTER XVIIL

STORIES.

That big letter which had been consigned to Agnes Stuart's pocket had been written in the quiet school-room of the Bank-house. It will perhaps interest you to read the contents of the envelope in Regina's own words. If there were defects in spelling, I shall not repeat them; but Regina was one of those children who could not remember the time when she was unable to read or spell. Spelling came to her as a natural gift, with great ease of expressing clearly what she meant.

Her difficulties in her lessons lay in arithmetic and the routine of grammar. In the days of her childhood, rules of grammar for French and English were laid down and rigidly enforced. And strange as it may seem to you who have been taught on a more modern system, when a simple exercise was before her, in which she had to apply certain rules, she was *greatly* at a loss; though apart from the rules, and thinking only of sense and sound, Regina

could have done the same thing pretty correctly. It was the excess of imaginative power in her which needed, as it were, ballast; just as a boat will not float well if too light. It may have lovely sails, and look like a graceful swan as it curtseys over the waves; but unless properly trimmed, it fails to make a good voyage.

Regina's lonely life had fed the imaginative part of her nature, and the writing stories from the ideal world in which she lived had not been calculated to strengthen that part of her mental powers which was deficient.

"That is a very long letter, Agnes," Lady Stuart said, as Agnes was hastening away from the diningroom to devour its contents.

"It's from Regina; I daresay it is all about coming here."

"Perhaps so; but Agnes, before you do anything else, those sums must be prepared for Mr. Goodwin."

"I am going out. I am going to see Miss Goodwin; she has invited us, mother."

"Not till you have done the sums Mr. Goodwin left for you," said Lady Stuart firmly.

"But I can't do them," Agnes said impatiently; "it's no use trying. I hate arithmetic, and so do a great many very clever people."

To argue a point with Agnes was always hopeless. Lady Stuart merely said—

- "Go to the schoolroom and do what I desire at once."
- "But who is to tell Miss Goodwin? I promised to be there at three o'clock."
- "I am going to the Rectory, and so you need not trouble yourself about that; and Nurse is coming with me to show off Bunchie and Berry," said Bertha.
- "It was I Miss Goodwin wanted, not you at all," pouted Agnes.
- "How unfortunate! Well, she must put up with me instead."
- "Oh, I do think you are the crossest, most disagreeable sister anybody ever had," were Agnes's parting words as she escaped with her big letter; and going to the deserted schoolroom, shut the door with a bang, and flinging herself into a large leather-covered arm-chair, cried vehemently for a few minutes. But the letter had yet to be read, and that was some consolation.

Agnes was rather disappointed at the first words, "My dear Agnes." Not even "dearest," and no suspicion of "darling" throughout, as she glanced down the first two pages.

"MY DEAR AGNES,—I have been told by Cousin Mary Turnbull that I am really to come to Barrow Court for a very long visit, while Cousin Mary and Mr. Turnbull are gone to Italy. I am to bring

Nurse and Puck with me, and do my lessons with Lady Stuart and Mr. Goodwin. I do feel afraid of Mr. Goodwin, and I am sure he will call me a dunce. Monsieur de Vallerie is to teach us all French; and that is a pity, for he is so tired of me. I never can make the participles agree with their nouns. Poor Miss Baker was not so glad as I expected when I went to see her to-day. She cried, and told me she was losing her daily bread. She looked so poor and thin in her little dark sitting-room, and she hugged and kissed me, and said it was 'a blow' to her, and that the days at the Bank were happy days.

"So odd! for she used to say I 'wool-gathered,' and 'lived in a fog,' and all sorts of things. I hope Lady Stuart will let me go and see her sometimes.

"I have had a very quiet time since that nice afternoon at St. Michael's strawberry gardens, and I have been wondering if I should come to Barrow Court, and yet afraid to ask. You said you would like to read a story of mine, so I send one; but it is only for you, please. I am afraid even you will laugh at me; but let no one else laugh at me; I should not like that at all.—Your affectionate friend,

"RICHENDA RANDALL."

"Dear me! how prim and proper this sounds; but Regina is not really prim, and it will be nice to have a friend to be always at hand, when Bertha is odious, and Rex tiresome with his goodness, and these little ones bothering. Now for the story. What a lot of it, to be sure! I don't think I can get through it, after all: it does not look interesting: there is nothing about nice people."

Then Agnes gave her "dearest Regina's" story a very cursory reading, and, turning a copybook upside down, began a story of her own, with which she was so engrossed that she forgot all about the sums and the visit to Miss Goodwin, till, at five o'clock, the connecting door opened from the nursery, and Hamish was wheeled in by Sophy, the under-nurse.

Agnes started up; her cheeks were hot, and her eyes full of excitement, while her fingers were covered with ink.

"What are you doing here, Agnes? I thought every one was out. I want my tea. Come, clear up the table. What are all these sheets lying on the floor?"

"Oh, that's an original tale, written by Regina Randall."

"Let me see it."

Quite forgetting Regina's request that she might not be laughed at, Agnes gathered up the sheets and tossed them over to Hamish.

"Yes, you may read it; I can't. But do listen to the opening of my tale, Hamish." "One thing at a time, please: I'll hear yours afterwards. And do clear the table, Agnes. Don't you see Sophy is waiting with the cloth?"

"Just wait five minutes more, Sophy, only five minutes. I have just got Lady Belinda to the Duke's mansion."

"Well, Miss Stuart, Nurse will want me directly she comes in, and she told me schoolroom-tea was never on no account to be later than five o'clock; and it has gone five, Miss Agnes."

But Agnes wrote on and kept Sophy waiting with the cloth over her arm for some minutes. At last she was obliged to huddle up her papers and carry them over to the window-seat. Here she knelt with the metal inkstand in a slippery place on the cushion of the window-seat. All this was not conducive to clear, legible characters, and Agnes's manuscript would in many parts have puzzled the cleverest printer who ever deciphered "copy."

Hamish was so much engrossed with Regina's story, that he forgot all about Agnes and hers, and he turned the sheets of Bath post paper over a second time when he had gone through them once.

"Now, Hamish, listen to my opening chapter," Agnes said.

"'It was a lovely, delicious, beautiful June morning of summer.'"

"Was it ever winter in June," interrupted Hamish, "in England?"

- "'Morning of summer," Agnes went on. "'The Lady Belinda stepped out upon her sapphire lawn."
- "I say, Agnes, come, that is too much. Fancy a blue lawn!"
- "Of course it was a slip. I meant—I meant amethyst."

But Hamish called out, "Worse and worse—purple grass this time! Well, go on."

- "'Stepped out on her lawn."
- "That's right; miss out the colour. Grass is known to be green without telling us. Go on."
- "'The heavens above were as blue as her sweet eyes, and she wore a perfectly lovely dress of purest white muslin, with a wide crimson sash, with a necklet of pearls, and bracelets of the same.'"
- "That's rather a smart dress for a country walk. I hope she had thick shoes, for the grass might happen to be wet with dew."
- "I shan't read any more now," said Agnes; "for here come the children, little plagues! and there will be no peace now."

In came little Blanche and Bernard, their hands full of flowers for Hamish, which Blanche said came from the "poor, poor blind lady, who can see no sun and no trees."

"And no trees!" echoed Berry.

Then Bertha and Rex came, and the nurse followed

with the plate of bread-and-butter and large rack of toast.

Lady Stuart always presided at the schoolroomtea; the twins were not as yet promoted to it, but for an occasional treat they were allowed to sit up on either side of their mother.

This afternoon their pleading eyes were turned towards her in vain; she scarcely noticed them. Lady Stuart's thoughts were full of little Tim, with whom she had been sitting that afternoon. Weak as he was, he listened with hungry eagerness to Lady Stuart as she told him in simple words all that children who are cared for and loved know from their baby days. Bunchie and Bernard went away sorrowfully with Nurse, and little guessed what was in their mother's heart—a yearning tenderness for them, which seemed to be greater than ever as she thought of Tim-Tim, only one of thousands who are born to live the ceaseless river and canal life, and die uncared for and untaught. Lady Stuart thought that Tim had not been sent to her without a reason, and she determined to consult with Mr. Goodwin as to means whereby the river people passing her door every day might be reached.

The tea was rather a silent one. Agnes was engrossed with the fate of Lady Belinda, while Hamish was thinking over the story which Agnes had so carelessly treated and given him to read.

Suddenly Lady Stuart turned to Agnes and said, "You had better take a run with Rex this evening, as you have been at home all the afternoon. I hope you did not find your sums very difficult when once you really applied to them."

Agnes was silent, and began to help herself to more bread-and-butter, murmuring something which Lady Stuart scarcely heard, but which caught Hamish's ear—

"No, they were not very difficult."

"You had better go out as soon as possible, for it is cloudy, and looks like rain. Will you like me to read to you this evening, Hamish?" his mother asked.

"I should like you to read this," Hamish said.
"I am sure you will think it clever. Come here, mother, and look."

"It is manuscript. Whose writing is it?"

"The girl who is coming here, Regina Randall."

"I must go and see my darlings for a little while, and then I will come back, and we will read the story together."

When Lady Stuart was gone, Agnes gathered up her papers, and calling Rex, said they would go down the drive and walk by the river.

Sophy had just disappeared with the tea-things, and Bertha was gone out of the room with Rex, when Hamish said—

- "Agnes, hadn't you better do those sums?"
- "Mind your own business," was the rude reply.
- "Well, it may not be my business exactly, but I wish you would speak out the truth when you are asked a question."
- "The truth! what do you mean? How dare you talk to me like that?"
- "I dare tell you that when mamma asked you if you found the sums difficult you said 'No,' and you know you have been writing a stupid story the whole afternoon; and mamma never thought you could have been so disobedient."
- "I don't care a bit what you say," said Agnes, "a spoiled boy like you; so keep your advice to yourself. Yes, Rex, I'm coming," and Agnes was gone.

Lady Stuart soon returned, and settled herself in the low chair which always stood near Hamish's sofa.

- "You have been better the last few days, dear Hamish," she said.
- "Yes; that is, I forget my pain when I am thinking of my work. Do you know, mother, whether Mr. Goodwin considers me a fearful dunce?"
- "I did not ask any direct question, Hamish, but I should hardly think Mr. Goodwin could say that, if I did," Lady Stuart said with a smile.
- "I don't know. I am ever so much behind-hand, and I do wish I could grow a little bigger. I should

not mind being lame, if I were not a dwarf. I have got an idea that I should like to try a pair of crutches. Will you ask Dr. Kemble what he thinks about it?"

"Yes; it is the very thing I wanted to suggest to you. Dr. Kemble will be here soon, and then we will consult him. Now, shall I read the story?"

"It won't take ten minutes," Hamish said. "But I should like to know what you think of it. It certainly is very well written, and every word spelt right, as far as I can see."

Hamish said, as he gave his mother the manuscript, "I shall take to writing stories next."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SONG OF THE RIVER.

THERE is a very little tiny stream which comes out from a spring up in the hills. The little stream comes running down and meets another, and they join; and after that another, and they join again; and soon the little stream is a big one, and then it is not called a stream any more, but a river.

The river sings its own story as it flows on to the sea, and as a child I know was walking on the bank one evening, the river's story grew into words something like this:—

"I have seen a great many things in my journey, and the most beautiful thing of all was a dear little child. Her name was May, and she lived in a cottage close to the village called Bayfield. I am wide enough to have a bridge built over me at Bayfield. Not a big stone bridge, only a wooden one, with planks of wood and a railing. At Bayfield I am very clear and bright, for it is only when I get to the city I am dark and muddy.

"Well, little May used to come every morning

and gather cresses at my edge, and take them home for breakfast. May was always singing, and I never heard her cry or say naughty, rough words. One day she brought her little brother with her, and while she was gathering the cresses he toddled up the bank alone, and was on the bridge before May could stop him. The poor little boy leaned over, laughing and nodding to his sister, and fell over into me. I could not stop, you know, for I must hurry on to the sea. Presently little May plunged in to save her little brother; but she was not strong enough. Some haymakers in a field not far off heard her cry, and came with their long rakes and got out the little boy; but, oh! not little May -not little May!

"I had to sing a sad song over her as she lay amongst the white pebbles with a smile on her face. They all grieved and wept for little May; but something told me that she was safe where no harm can happen to her any more.

"Do you think this is a sad tale of mine? I hope not. I can tell you another, which is more joyful. A boat floated down with me to the old Grey Friars Bridge in the city, and out of the boat leaped a fine strong sailor-boy; and his mother, who thought he had been lost at sea, held out her arms to him and cried, 'Oh, my son! my son is come home at last!'

"Then I can tell you how once,-I know nothing

about time, so I cannot say when it was, for you know I am always flowing to the sea or back again to the land, and mu time is only 'ebb and flow.' Well. once, as I say, I don't know when, a little, very dirty, very thin, poor little boy fell from a barge. cradled him gently on my breast, which they say is very cold, but it was all I could do for him; when a boy plunged into me, caught him, and dragged him from me, and, happier than little May, saved himself and the little dirty boy. But I say to myself, 'Little May, beautiful little May, lying amongst the white pebbles, is safe, and sleeps to wake no more to trouble, while the little ragged dirty boy has much trouble before him.' I have heard him moaning with pain often since then, as the barge floats upon my breast.

"That brave boy who dashed in sometimes swims out on me in the little curve I take close under St. Michael's woods. It is good to feel him spreading out his strong white arms and lying safe on me, as I sprinkle his thick curls with drops which shine in the morning sun.

"I hear them say sometimes that I am a dull river, but I take the colours of the sunset sky, and they make me bright, and I smile up to the clear blue above me of a morning, and, as it smiles down on me, I grow like it."

This is the river's song. I cannot put it in real

words; but there is one thing more which the river tells me, that, though the little lonely girl who walks by its side is often dull and not bright or clever, she can try to reflect the light of something higher and better than herself, and be patient and kind, and not cross and sulky. But she is lonely sometimes, and very sad. When she sees brothers and sisters with dear fathers and mothers, she can't help wishing she had a home like them.

But this story is too long, and will tire anybody to read. It is written for a friend who wished to have it, but it is very private and particular, and on no account is any one else to see it.

R. R.

When Lady Stuart stopped reading, Hamish said, "Could you have thought that little dark-eyed girl could have written such a story?"

"It is a very touching story," Lady Stuart said; "but, Hamish, it was not intended for your eyes or mine. Agnes had no right to make it public."

"No, that is true," Hamish said. "What ought I to do?"

"Give it back to Agnes, and be careful to make no remark about it before Regina. Poor dear child! I feel more glad than ever that it is arranged for her to come to us."

"Yes, only she will find our company worse than loneliness, I expect. Agnes is not the dear friend she fancies she is."

"I wish indeed there was more love amongst you, my elder children," Lady Stuart said with a sigh. "Hamish, we all *must* try to be more harmonious."

"We!" exclaimed Hamish; "as if you could be more kind, and loving, and"——

Hamish's voice faltered, and he turned his face away; he could not bear to be seen crying, but the tears would come in spite of all his efforts.

"I am sure," he said, after a few minutes' silence, "I wonder you have a scrap of patience left with us. A contradictory, wrangling set! I hope Bunchie and Berry won't take after us. You see, I think it was that we all lived apart before you came. No one really loved us when father was in India after our mother died; we were split up into bits, and we can't stick together again."

"Rex ought to hold you all together, Hamish," Lady Stuart said.

"Yes, he is almost too good. I sometimes get angry because I can't make him angry. About Agnes's sums"——

Hamish stopped. Should he tell what he suspected? for he had no absolute proof. No, he would wait; but he would watch Agnes very closely, and tell her what he thought about her showing him the story which had been written only for her to see. He had, on the first reading, hardly taken in how very urgent the request was that no one might read it

but Agnes, and he felt sorry he had shown it to his mother.

The next morning, when Agnes and he were alone together, waiting for the others to come for Monsieur de Vallerie's French lesson. Hamish said—

"Here is Regina's story, Agnes; put it away in your desk, and don't let any one else see it, because it is wrong."

"Wrong! what nonsense!"

"Well, the poor child says at the end she begs nobody may see it but you, and trusts to you."

Agnes laughed.

"As if a stupid little story like that mattered. I don't call it a story. I can't say I have read it all; it's all about children being drowned and coming to life again. *Mine* is far more like a real story."

"Tastes differ," said Hamish. "If yours is more like a story, it's not like what happens every day, nor like what one sees every day."

"Your opinion makes no difference to me. I can tell you Regina is very fond indeed of me, and she is certain to like whatever I do. So you won't set her against me if you try."

"I don't think Regina Randall would tell or act a lie," said Hamish significantly.

Agnes made no reply to this; and Bertha and Rex came in for their French lesson.

Monsieur de Vallerie soon appeared. He was a little dapper man, with a keen black eye, and a mass of hair so black that it could hardly have grown on the head of a man of sixty without some help of wig or dye.

Monsieur de Vallerie wore a blue frock-coat, very much pinched in at the waist, and very short in the sleeves, which showed deep wristbands. A pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses hung round his neck by a bit of watered ribbon. He made very low bows to his new pupils, and shrugged his shoulders when Lady Stuart introduced him to Hamish.

"Il est boiteux? Pauvre petit!"

Hamish could not understand the words, but he understood the sign of pity, and he gruffly replied to his French master's greeting, returning his scrutinising glance, and saying to himself, "I know I shall hate him."

"Mademoiselle Randall, n'est elle pas ici? Is she not here? I did understand she joined our class."

"Miss Randall does not come here yet," Lady Stuart said; "Mr. Turnbull does not start till next week."

"Ah! vraiment. Allons! tell me what you have learned and what you have done. The exercises?—good. The translation?—good! bon! I will put you through a few questions, and I will then see what you each do."

Monsieur de Vallerie now addressed himself to his work in good earnest, and the result of the examination went to show that Agnes knew "a little something," Miss Bertha not much, and "the two jeune garçons nothing—rien! nothing!"

Rex could not help laughing at the gestures with which this opinion was given, and Monsieur de Vallerie's sharp black eyes were on him at once.

"Do you laugh to know nothing? Ah! well, I would laugh to know something. Now attendez, tenez, commencez. The alphabet now."

I daresay the children who read this story will think the children in the Barrow Court schoolroom very backward, especially when they hear that only Agnes could repeat the French letters as they are sounded. But I am telling you of things as they were; and too often children learned to read French without an idea of spelling it. No wonder that it was a mystery to them to spell table in English and pronounce it "te-ar-be-el-a" in French.

Monsieur de Vallerie went to the root of the matter; and if he was exacting in the rules and application of them, he was determined to get the little English tongues well drilled before they advanced farther; and the consequence was Monsieur de Vallerie was very successful in teaching French to English children.

CHAPTER XX.

PAST AND PRESENT.

On the second evening after Tim had been taken into the cottage at Barrow, Amos walked up the neat garden path between the gay sweet-williams and nasturtiums and pinks, his large heavy boots threatening to crush the borders of box if he swayed either to the right or the left.

When Amos reached the neat trellised porch, he saw beyond the spotless kitchen, where, on a rug before the fire, a large tabby cat was purring over two kittens. Pussie's tail swelled and her back rose at the sight of Amos's huge figure, and his one thud at the door brought Mrs. Gaze from the back premises.

"No, we don't want anything to-day, thank you, my man."

Amos touched his forehead respectfully, for in his eyes Mrs. Gaze, with her neat cap, black gown with little lilac spots, and white apron, was a very important and imposing person.

"I be come to see the little chap," Amos said, jerking his head in the direction of the staircase. "I be come to see Luke Jones's boy."

"Oh, there! I don't know if you can see him," and Mrs. Gaze glanced at Amos's boots. "His worthless father was here yesterday, and he was half-tipsy, and that's the honest truth."

Amos twisted his hat about in his large fingers, and said in a sheepish way—

"Please, ma'am, I am sober enow. I do want to see Tim; he's all the world to me, he is."

Mrs. Gaze looked a little relenting.

"Please, ma'am, I'll do away with them here;" and forthwith Amos began to kick off his heavy boots, one flying farther than he intended, and sending the cat into a fit of unspeakable terror, as she seized a kitten in her mouth and rushed away with it into the back kitchen.

"Deary me! it's a word and a blow with you," exclaimed Mrs. Gaze. "What ails your arm, then?"

"It's withered up, ma'am; it's no good to me."

"Well, you shall come up and see the poor little fellow. I have got rather fond of him, and that's the truth, though when her Ladyship first asked me to take him in, I felt as if it went against me; those barge children are such a nuisance here. But there's something in this one I can't get over, and if he had lived to be a man, he'd not have been a bad sort. But there! it's better he should die than live with a father like that half-tipsy fellow who came stumbling in here yesterday."

"Don't say Tim's a-going to die, missis," said Amos; "I can't bear that."

"Well, he won't die the more for my saying so," said Mrs. Gaze; "but I don't think the doctor or her Ladyship has much hope of him. Hark!"

And now a little faint cry was heard from the room above, and Mrs. Gaze went to the foot of the stairs to listen.

The cry grew louder and more distinct, and Amos, colouring with delight to the very roots of his hair, said—

"He's calling Amos; let me go up to him, missis."

Mrs. Gaze made no further objection, and Amos
proceeded to climb the stairs, which creaked and
groaned under his weight.

There, in a pretty white bed, lay the child Amos so dearly loved, pale and wan, but his own little Tim.

His great breast heaved as he stood by the bed. A wide gulf seemed set between him and that little fragile creature. He did not seem to him the same as the bundle of rags which had so often been hushed on his breast to sleep. Tim's rough, tangled, and dirty hair had been cut close to his head. There was no grimy mark now on the little sunk cheeks,

while the small hands lay pure and clean on the checked coverlid.

Amos had a sort of feeling that the child had already passed beyond his reach, and that he was not fit to touch him. Choked with his emotion, he stood quite still gazing down on Tim, while Mrs. Gaze talked for both, discovered that it was time for Tim's physic, and went downstairs to fetch a clean glass. Then Tim and his friend were left alone.

"Amos," Tim began, "kneel down; I can't reach you up so high."

Amos obeyed, and Tim turned with difficulty towards him and folded his arms round his neck.

"I knew 'twas your voice, Amos. I wish I was at home again, I do, along with you and poor father."

"You must not say so, boy," Amos replied in a low husky tone. "You have all that heart can wish here. It's a deal nicer than the 'Sarah Anne' here, and the hospital is nothing to it. You are a lucky little chap after all, Tim."

"I'd rather be along with you, Amos," was the reply. "You've taken care of the suit with the bright buttons—eh, Amos?"

"Yes, my boy, that's as right as ninepence, and so'll you be soon."

Tim shook his head.

"I don't expect I shall. The pain gnaws my legs

Commence

at night, and I am quite as hot here; and I want you, Amos."

"Don't you think I want you, then? Why, Tim, it's not the same thing to be without you."

"I say, Amos," Tim began again, "I say, the lady who brought me here told me a lot about the Lord yesterday. Just what you've told me, only more; and she says she knows that the Lord loves poor Tim, and that He'll be sure enough to make me happy, and good too. She taught me a prayer to say to Him, but it makes my head dizzy if I try to think it. I am always fancying I am in the barge, and the water going on—on—on, and I am slipping into it; then I catch hold of you in a fright, and wake, and find it's not you after all."

Tim's eyes began to grow heavy with talking so much, and Mrs. Gaze coming back with the medicine, ordered Amos to cut short his visit.

"You'll let me come again, missis?" he asked.
"You'll be sure let me come again? Good-bye, Tim!"

But Tim was too weak to respond even by a whispered good-bye, and Amos went downstairs. Then he picked up his big heavy boots, and pulling them on with his one hand as adroitly and quickly as many would have done so with the full use of two, Amos went sorrowfully away.

At the garden-gate he met Rex, who was frequent in his inquiries at the cottage. "Beg your pardon, sir. What do you think of the little chap?"

"He is rather bad, I'm afraid," said Rex. "You are not his father?"

"No, sir," said Amos, "I ain't his father, but that little chap is about the only thing I've got to love; and what's more, he's about the only creature that loves me—least ways, in this world."

Rex, boy as he was, could detect the deep emotion which poor Amos's voice betrayed.

"We'll hope for the best," he said. "I know my mother, Lady Stuart, will do all that she can for the poor little fellow. He is well looked after here."

And now another inquirer walked up to the gate—Mr. Goodwin.

Amos touched his forehead by way of salute and strode away, a pain at his honest heart which brought hot, bitter tears to his eyes.

"He's a-going to die, my poor little chap, that's how it is. I can't think why the Lord should take him away. I'd rather He had taken away my right leg as well as arm, that I would."

"Who is that man?" Mr. Goodwin asked of Rex.
"The child's father?"

"No," Rex said; "he is only a friend, I think."

"A friend worth having then," was the short reply.
"How is the child? Shall I go in and see him?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Gaze, who had come down-

stairs, and was carefully sweeping up the marks of Amos's feet from the floor, "the child is asleep; he was tired out by the visit of that great heavy fellow. Dr. Moore said he was to be let sleep when he could."

"Certainly! I won't disturb him," Mr. Goodwin said. "Does Mr. Moore think him better?"

"I am sure I can't say, sir. Doctors are very close, sir, and I never rightly know what they mean."

Mr. Goodwin turned away and Rex followed him. Mr. Goodwin liked Rex's society, and when separated from the rest of his pupils, he was not afraid to show his preference. The bright open boyish face recalled, as I have said, one that was hidden for ever from his sight in this world.

"Good-bye, sir," Rex said when they had gone some distance together, and had had a pleasant conversation about some curious birds' eggs Rex had found lying amongst the sedges by the river, Mr. Goodwin apparently being as familiar with the habits, species, and behaviour of birds as with Greek and Latin verbs.

"Come up to the Rectory with me," Mr. Goodwin said, "and I will show you a collection of eggs, carefully classed and labelled by my son long ago, which I think from your description may throw some light on your specimens."

Rex was delighted at the proposal, and was keep-

ing up with Mr. Goodwin's strides as best he could, when he suddenly stopped.

"I cannot come now, sir, but if you will let me, I should like to come to-morrow. I promised Hamish to go back with a butterfly if I caught one, and he will be expecting me. He wanted to paint one of the common tortoise-shells, and I caught one without a net."

Rex pulled out of his pocket a little tin box as he spoke, and there lay the poor butterfly, smothered with camphor, not impaled with a pin.

"Poor thing! I hate to shut them up; but then Hamish is always shut up, and it's an amusement to him to paint them. Have you seen his paintings, sir?"

"Yes," Mr. Goodwin said. "I am glad he has such a nice amusement. You are quite right not to disappoint your brother. Good-bye!"

"I should like to have seen the eggs though," Rex said to himself. "I hope he won't forget to ask me another day; he is very 'absent-minded,' as Nurse calls it, and no one can ever tell what he is thinking of."

Then Rex changed his walking pace into a run, and was very soon at Hamish's side with the little tin box and the imprisoned butterfly.

That evening. Mr. Goodwin went up to a little room where his wife kept her relics. It was a little room at the top of the house, and here were treasured many little things which his boy had used and cared for.

His fishing-rods, his bookshelf, with the stories of adventure and travel of which he was so fond. His cricket-bat and the blue cap with the badge of his schoolhouse on the front. Mr. Goodwin did not often enter this room—not nearly so often as his wife did—and it was touching to see how soft was his tread, and how gently he turned the key of an old-fashioned bureau, and took from it a cabinet with many drawers, where the birds' eggs were all so neatly arranged and labelled. He put his glasses on his nose and examined them with a keen glance, drawer by drawer, the tiny wrens and tomtits in the upper row. With a heavy sigh he replaced them, saying—

"I will bring the boy here to see them. If she has no objection, I will give the whole collection to him one day. He is more like him than any boy I ever saw."

I need not say by "she" Mr. Goodwin meant his wife, and by "him," Rex Stuart.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST EVENING.

REGINA'S last day had come at the Bank-house. With Puck in her arms to keep him out of mischief, she was going through the large deserted rooms. The furniture of the drawing-room was all swathed in folds of what Mrs. Turnbull called "dustingsheets." 'The carpets were rolled up, the pictures taken down, and all turned like children in disgrace with their faces to the wall. Three rooms were left untouched for the use of Mr. Mortimer, the head clerk, and these were the dining-room on the ground floor, and the schoolroom and nursery. Mr. Mortimer wanted either by name; but a variety of furniture gathered from other parts of the house had been placed in the schoolroom, a sofa and two easy-chairs amongst them. Curtains were hung at the windows, and, as Nurse said, you did not know where you found yourself. With so many other rooms in the house, she thought it "stuff and nonsense to bring Mr. Mortimer up there; but it was not her place to interfere."

Mr. Mortimer was very glad to find himself in the Bank-house at all, and the schoolroom and nursery were quite sufficient for his daily use. He could see his friends in the spacious dining-room, but the upper regions quite satisfied him.

Regina went through every room, even venturing into Mrs. Turnbull's with bated breath, and holding Puck so tight that he gave a little whine of remonstrance. In this room some of Regina's dim memories gathered, and they came before her now, as she stood looking round at the objects connected with a day long, long ago, when she was held in Nurse's arms, sobbing and awe-struck, and saw her father propped up in a chair by the fire, pale and shadow-like, and heard him say, in a voice which came back to her now, "Regina, kiss me; Regina, good-bye!"

Then the child passed out to the corridor, and paused before her mother's picture—that sweet, gay, laughing mother. By this time Puck's fluffy head was wet with the big tears which fell from his little mistress's eyes. Then she went cautiously down the grand staircase and out into the garden. It was a dull chill evening, and there was no temptation to linger under the wall upon the turf, as on that hot day when we first saw Regina seated on the grass. The gate of the inner garden was open, and Regina found the old gardener there. He was watering the

flowers and picking off dead leaves as if nothing unusual was about to happen. But when he saw Reginache stopped.

"Well, Missie, so you are going away. The place won't be like the same, I am sure. I don't know what'll become of us. And mark my words, the poor Master will never come back; he's in a galloping decline, that's certain."

"What is a galloping decline?" asked Regina.

"Why, a galloping consumption," was the only explanation Rowley could give. "He's been a good master, he has. Not like your papa, of course; but I make no complaints of him. He may be a trifle 'near' and 'close,' but that's on account of Madam being always at him. I'm for charity beginning at home, I am. There, Miss Regeena, did you ever see a bigger head of geranium than that? It's just a miracle."

"Good-bye, Rowley," Regina said, as she turned to retrace her steps, and she held out her small hand to be shaken by Rowley's rough brown one. Rowley wiped his own hand first carefully on his apron, and then took Regina's for a moment as he would take the stalk of a tender plant to lift up the flower to notice.

"We'll be often seeing you, Miss Regeena," he said; "and come what may, this is always your house and home. We'll have you missis here one day."

Regina had heard old Rowley say this before, and it had been darkly hinted by Nurse and Jane the upper housemaid; but she was too simple and child-like to understand much about the ways and means by which this would be effected.

Agnes Stuart had said something of the same kind, and about her having a great deal of money; but it did not imply much to her mind. Friends, brothers, and sisters, a happy home, these were what Regina longed for; and money without them was of no great value or importance.

When in the hall again she paused; the door of the Bank-parlour was to her right, and she heard a low hacking cough, the sound of which she knew well. It was Mr. Turnbull's.

Was the cough a sign of the "galloping decline" of which the gardener spoke?

She listened to it with awe and sympathy, a ceaseless teasing cough, which did not sound loud or violent, but quick, dry, and short, followed at intervals by a great effort to clear the throat.

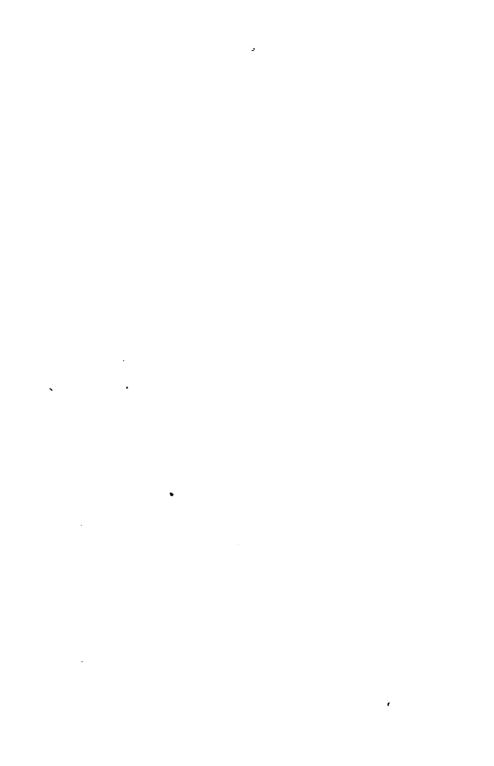
In a short lull in the sound, Regina drew near the door, put her fingers on the handle, and turning it, found herself in her cousin's presence.

A number of papers and letters lay on the big table before him, while on a little round table between the easy-chair and the fire stood some lemonade which he sipped before he could speak to Regina.

- "I was going to send for you, my dear. Put Puck down and come here. You are just eleven years old, Regina."
 - "Yes, Cousin Andrew."
- "Regina, you are scarcely old enough to talk to about money and business, but I thought I should like to tell you, in case I should never come back, that"——
- "Oh, I hope you will come back, Cousin Andrew," Regina said, "and be quite well."

Mr. Turnbull shook his head.

- "All things are most uncertain, my dear, but I have something here of yours, which I wish to give you before I leave home. When your father died he made me your sole guardian and trustee. All the money matters are arranged with Mr. Coleridge, the senior partner in the Bank, and his son; when the time comes you will hear everything from them. But here," he said, stooping and taking something out of the iron box with white letters, "is a packet and a small box which are addressed to you in your father's hand. You will see what is written on them.
- "'To be opened by my daughter Regina on her eighteenth birthday, and to be preserved for her till then by my friend Andrew Turnbull.'
 - "As I said, my dear, everything is so uncertain.





"And flinging her arms round Mr. Turnbull's neck, she sobbed bitterly, with her face buried on his shoulder."— Page,197.

that I feel it is better to give them to you now. Keep them safely, and I need not say, do not open either packet or letter."

Regina stood ooking down at the box and packet with a strange, almost frightened glance.

"Where shall I put them?" she asked.

"You have some desk or safe place, I suppose. Ask Nurse about it. And now, my dear, goodbye. I am sorry to part with you. Your Cousin Mary and I never had any children, and I fancy we have treated you too much as if you were grown up—I mean, not considered enough that a child wanted children to play with. But your father particularly wished you should not go to school; he had an objection to schools, and that is why we had a governess for you. Lady Stuart's proposal was a fortunate one, for you will have companions now. I know Sir Montague very well, and I have written to him about you, so when he comes home you will have a good friend in him."

"I hope you'll come home soon, Cousin Andrew," Regina faltered. "I—I——" and then with a sudden impulse Regina put the little box and packet on the table, and flinging her arms round Mr. Turnbull's neck, she sobbed bitterly, with her face buried on his shoulder.

"There, there! my dear, don't cry. God bless you, my dear. You are a good child, and"——

A fit of coughing interrupted him, and the door opened and Mrs. Turnbull came in. Puck growled at the approach of his enemy, and Regina darted off, snatching up her packet of letters and box, and before Mrs. Turnbull could recover her astonishment, was gone.

"What have you been doing, my dear? Why, Miss Regina," Nurse asked, "who has been scolding you? Was it about Puck? You should not have There! pray don't cry, for taken him downstairs. I feel as 'dull as ditch-water,' and that's the truth. Home is home, and I've made mine here so many years, it isn't likely I should like going to a strange place to mix with other folks' servants. like them that I saw, the day the poor child was nearly drowned. The nurse of the house was so fine. I thought it was my lady herself. Very unbecoming to my notions to wear mousseline de laines gowns, and cap-strings flapping in the wind. My notions may be old-fashioned, but service is service. I wouldn't leave you, my lamb, for fifty thousand pounds. Now, don't cry and take on like that. See, here's Mrs. Browne come up herself with your supper."

Mrs. Browne was the cook, and had with some difficulty mounted the stairs with a tray of dainties for Regina's last supper in the schoolroom. Mrs. Browne was also one of the old servants who had known Regina's mother, and had, as it were, belonged

to the house. She was to be left in charge now with two young servants under her; the others were to be discharged, except, of course, Rowley, whose flowers and greenhouse were in too fine order to allow of his leaving them to strangers.

"Now, Miss Regina, my dear," Mrs. Browne said, panting between every word, "here's your favourite little 'finger-puffs' with apricot jam, and some whipped cream. Come, now, let me see you enjoy them; and first, there's a couple of tongue sandwiches and a bottle of ginger syrup. Now, don't cry any more. This is a world of changes and troubles, and children, like other folks, must just put up with it. We'll see you back again, and you'll be quite the young lady then. Now, there's a dear,—I want to see you enjoy your supper. And what's Jane bringing up? I declare, it's your new frock come from Mrs. Steele. Well, you ought to be pleased."

Regina began to show some signs of interest in the new frock and cape to match, which the apricot finger-puffs had failed to kindle.

"I wonder how it will fit," Nurse said; "better, I hope, than the grey merino. Come, when you've finished your supper, my dear, we'll try it on."

This was done accordingly, and Regina was really pleased with the blue and white check frock, made with two frills at the bottom of the skirt, and one to match round the cape. "There! with your white

hat and blue ribbon you will look nice," and Nurse stroked and pulled at the dress, while Mrs. Browne and Jane admired and approved, and Regina thought she should really feel more like Agnes and Bertha than she had done before.

And now another servant came running up to say Miss Regina was to go and bid Mrs. Turnbull goodnight directly.

"Yes, go down in your new frock, there's a dear. What are those on the table?"

"Oh, please, Nurse, will you put them away for me safe in my workbox? They are something I am not to open for a long time. Cousin Andrew gave them to me."

"Come, Miss Regina, Mrs. Turnbull will be in a way if you don't make haste."

Away went Regina in her blue frock, and found Mrs. Turnbull with a tired, harassed face at a table covered with account-books.

"Regina, as we are going to part to-morrow, I thought I should like to say a few words. Is that your new dress? Turn round. Yes, it fits very well, but I only ordered one frill. Never mind! As we part to-morrow, I should like to make you a little present. You will probably have to be very much neater in your habits at Barrow Court than you have been here. I bought you this desk; it is not ornamental, but it is useful and roomy. It will hold

a great many exercise-books, and I have stocked it with writing-paper, sealing-wax, and a packet of envelopes, penholders, and pencils."

"Thank you very much for it," Regina said, her eyes shining with pleasure. "I like it better than anything you could have given me."

"It has a good lock," Mrs. Turnbull said, turning the little key with a satisfactory snap backwards and forwards. "I do hope, my dear Regina, you will try to correct your faults, and that I shall hear a very good account of you from Lady Stuart. You must be kind and obliging to the Miss Stuarts, and obedient to your tutor and those in authority over you. When we return next year, we shall find you much grown, and I hope improved in every way. Mr. Turnbull was rather the worse for your breaking in on him; you need self-control, my dear. I am sure you did not intend to do Mr. Turnbull harm."

"Oh, no!" Regina said vehemently. "I can't bear to see him so ill—so very ill."

Her choked voice warned her to stop. Was Mrs. Turnbull as unconscious of the real state of her husband as she seemed to be, or was it the wilful blindness with which we look on those dear to us when they are ill? Regina could not tell. She received the large mahogany desk from Mrs. Turnbull's hands, and two kisses, one on each cheek, and left the room. As she did so, she turned to close the

door, which, with her burden in her hands, was rather difficult, when she saw Mrs. Turnbull was covering her face with her hands as if she were crying.

"Poor Cousin Mary!" Regina sighed. "I am so sorry for her!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FIRST DAYS AT BARROW COURT.

LADY STUART was in the hall to receive Regina, whom she kissed affectionately, and took her to the room prepared for her.

"Your maid will occupy the next room, as I thought you would feel lonely perhaps at first. It was Rex's room, but he gave it up willingly."

Regina looked round her pretty little room with surprise and pleasure. It was in the front of the many-windowed house; two of them fell to its share, and both looked out on the river and meadows lying beyond.

There were signs of care in the preparation made for her; flowers on her little dressing-table, and books in the hanging shelves against the walls.

"Monsieur de Vallerie is here for an hour this morning. It is the only lesson on Saturdays. I generally sit in the schoolroom during this lesson, but I leave Mr. Goodwin alone with his pupils. You will not wish to join Monsieur de Vallerie's

class to-day, I am sure. Ah! here is Nurse. I do hope you will be comfortable," Lady Stuart said. "I felt sure you would prefer being next Miss Randall."

"Yes, indeed, ma'am—your Ladyship, I ought to say. I am sure you are very considerate. They are two beautiful rooms, and so cheerful."

"Mother! mother!" cried two little voices in the corridor; and then the twins appeared, Bunchie grave and impressed with the strangeness of the arrival of the "little new girl and her dog," and advancing to kiss her, as she stood by her mother.

"The little new girl" was rather puzzled how to receive the twins' attentions, and did not help them to feel at ease. Puck was very doubtful how to treat them, and kept up a show of hostility by sundry low growls, and close crouching by his mistress's side.

"Now we will leave you and Nurse to unpack and settle yourselves, and I have no doubt, as soon as the schoolroom party are free, some of them will find their way to you. Bunchie and Berry toddled after their mother, Berry for once taking the initiative, and slowly pronouncing the words, "Little new girl's dog won't bite Berry, oh! no."

This was by way of assuring himself of the fact, for he cast anxious glances behind him to make sure Puck was not following him. Puck had no such intention; he was sniffing with his little black nose

under every chair, jumping up on one window-seat and down again to jump on the other, and restlessly pattering hither and thither, which was Puck's way of making himself at home.

Regina's ways were very different. She sat in one of the window-seats and watched Nurse's operations as she passed from one room to the other with Regina's property, putting it into drawers, and placing various little articles on the chimney-piece. Presently she appeared with Mrs. Turnbull's parting present, the large mahogany desk. This was placed in the centre of a small table, and the workbox by its side.

"You'd better keep the keys of the two, my dear," Nurse said; "there's the sealed packet in the desk, you know."

"Yes; but please, Nurse, keep the key for fear I should lose it."

"Nonsense! it's time you took care of some of your own property. You ain't a baby any longer."

And now there was a sound of approaching feet in the long passage, and in another moment Agnes rushed in.

"Oh, you darling! how nice it is to have you!" and Regina was seized and hugged rapturously.

"Old Vallerie stayed over his time on purpose to spite me, I do believe. I heard the carriage drive up, and I knew it was you. Thank you for your letter; it wasn't half as long as mine to you, but I liked the story. I have got one to read you written by myself. Shall we get off this afternoon and sit together in the summer-house and I'll read you the first two chapters? Hush! here's Bertha."

"How do you do?" said Bertha, holding out her cheek for a kiss. "Hamish wants to see you. So, if you are ready for dinner, you may as well come now."

"Wait a minute; Miss Regina, you have not got your pinafore." And Nurse unfolded one of the old-fashioned shaped pinafores and resolutely tied it on Regina.

"I wonder you don't wear aprons; they are so much nicer," said Bertha, as they went together to the schoolroom. "Here's Regina, Hamish. I told her you were dying to see her."

Hamish shrugged his shoulders.

"Like your stories! I didn't say I wanted to see her."

Of course this made Regina feel very uncomfortable, but Rex came to the rescue. He had been upstairs to brush his hair and take away sundry ink-spots from his fingers.

"I say," he began, "I am very glad you have come; and here's your white dog. He isn't very friendly, is he?"

"He will get used to you in time," Regina said; "he feels strange in this house."

"So do you, I daresay," Rex said kindly, "but we'll soon make you feel at home. Monsieur de Vallerie was quite put out because you did not come for a French lesson at once."

"It must be because he wants me to scold," Regina said; "it can't be for anything else."

Agnes and Bertha had gone to prepare for dinner, and Rex now raced off again to snatch a moment to investigate the condition of his newly fledged fantails for the third time that day, and Regina was left alone with Hamish.

She stood by the table looking over the pages of a book which lay there, and feeling very awkward and shy. Hamish was apparently engaged in examining a moth with a little hand-microscope, but he was in reality thinking more of the rudeness of his speech to Bertha about Regina than of the spots on the moth's wings. Besides, he had wanted to see Regina; he had been looking forward to her coming; he had a secret admiration for a child who could write the "Song of the River," which he remembered, with some feeling of shame, had been committed to his sister for her to read, and was not intended for any one else to see.

Hamish felt cross with everybody, and most of all with himself; and he did not break the silence by any remark, while Regina was afraid to do so.

"We were such good friends last time I was here," she was thinking. "I thought he would have liked to see me again; but how silly I am to think they can any of them really be glad to have me! After all, I believe I was happier at home in the schoolroom."

The bell sounding for dinner broke in upon this meditation, and Regina went downstairs with the rest.

Unlike her silent meal in the Bank-house, there was plenty of conversation. Lady Stuart did not discourage this conversation, and had a gentle way of guiding the somewhat noisy stream into a quieter strain.

It was no easy task that Lady Stuart had undertaken, the home education of these girls and boys; but she set about it as a skilful gardener does the cultivation of neglected flower-beds and long unshaven lawns. The weeds that have been permitted to get ahead for some months or years cannot be got rid of all at once, and will persistently appear from time to time to overshadow the fairest flowers or destroy the emerald smoothness of the turf.

Perhaps some people might say that Lady Stuart's hand was too gentle, and that she would have effected more with a stronger and harsher discipline However that might be, she spared herself in nothing, and devoted herself to the work which lay before her with quiet perseverance.

Regina felt grateful to Lady Stuart for leaving her alone, and not asking her questions or trying to draw her into the conversation. The Stuarts were very much given to contradiction; they had apparently a pleasure in it; and if it had not been for Rex's good temper, wranglings and "discussions" would often have ended in quarrels.

The first afternoon was spent in a visit to St. Michael's Rectory, which did not please Agnes. She wished to stroll about the gardens and grounds; and a roll of copybook which was sticking out of her pocket, containing the history of the "Lady Belinda," stayed there, as no opportunity presented itself for reading it to Regina.

The next day was Sunday, and on Sunday evening Regina was seated before her large desk in the schoolroom, writing a journal of events. Hamish and she had scarcely exchanged a word, and he was lying on his sofa watching her, though he did not seem to do so.

This is what Regina wrote:-

"Barrow Court, August 6.—I came here yesterday with Nurse. I have a very pretty bedroom, and I like to see the river from the windows. We went to St. Michael's Rectory yesterday. Miss Goodwin is

almost blind, but she is very happy. She sang to us. Mr. Goodwin played for her. Her voice is a low voice. Agnes said she did not like it, but I did. I am dreading my first lessons with Mr. Goodwin; he looks as if he could find out everything; he is sure to find out at once that I know nothing.

"We had a lesson to do for Lady Stuart to-day; it was to learn part of a chapter in St. Matthew's Gospel. I could not say mine at all. Agnes knew every word, and Rex said his perfectly. I love Lady Stuart; she is so gentle and kind. I liked the hymn I had to learn, and the rhyme helped me to remember it. Lady Stuart told us so much about the man who wrote it, and how unhappy he often was, and that big billows of sorrow often rolled over him.

'The billows swell, the winds are high, Clouds overcast my wintry sky,'

is the beginning of the hymn. Lady Stuart had been repeating it to poor little Tim. I do so want to see him, and perhaps Lady Stuart will let me go with her soon.

"It is all very strange here, and Rex is so good to me and to every one. He gives up his own way and his own wishes always.

"Nurse says—I forgot, I am not to call her Nurse, they say it confuses her with Bunchie and Berry's nurse, and that she is to be called my maid, Mrs. Clarke. I shan't call her 'Clarke,' but 'Nurse,' always to her face, though I suppose when I speak of her I must say 'Clarke.'

"Agnes has written a story about grand people. She is vexed with me because I said I did not care for lords and ladies in stories; but then if I knew any grand people it might be different. Hamish does not speak to me. I don't know why. I wish I did. He is quite, quite different to that first day I saw him, and "——

Regina paused, and, resting her cheek on her hand, looked out of the window, not really thinking of the sky, or the trees, or her dear river, but thinking of Hamish.

The journal stopped here for this time, for Hamish spoke.

"That is a long letter you are writing."

"It's not a letter," Regina said; "it's nothing." But she blushed crimson, for had she not been writing about him?

She hastily put away her copybook, where she had been writing her journal, and closed the desk, locking it, but not putting the key into her pocket.

"Why did not you go to church this evening?"
Hamish asked.

"Lady Stuart said I might stay at home, and I liked it best."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FALLS.

Hamish was silent again for a minute, and then he said—

- "You must be very fond of writing."
- "Yes; I have had nothing else to do, you know, but read and write"—— Regina stopped.
 - "And what?"
- "Talk to myself. I daresay you will think me very silly."
- "Well, you've got plenty to talk to now." Then with a weary sigh he said, "Do you mind reading aloud?"
- "Oh, no; only I am not sure that I read very well. I'll read directly, if you will tell me what you like to hear."
- "There's a lot of books up there in the bookcase. Get up on a chair and you will be able to reach them."

Regina mounted, and still was not tall enough to reach the top shelf. So she had to balance herself

with one foot on the edge of the bookcase, and one foot on the back of the chair.

"Read out the names of the books," Hamish said, "and I will tell you what I like best."

"'The Child's Companion," Regina read from the back of some very plainly bound books.

"Oh, no; try another."

"'The Hope of the '--- I can't read the word.

"'The Hope of the Katzekoffs.' No, that's stupid; and besides, it is Sunday, and that's not a Sunday book, or a Monday one either. Try again."

"'The Wide Wide World.' Is that new?"

"It's all about a girl. I don't care for it; you may like it. It's rather a nice book, and Rex has read it. Try again."

"'Ministering Children.'"

"Yes, that will do."

Regina leaned forward a little too far to reach the book, and overbalancing herself, fell to the ground.

Poor Hamish was helpless to do anything, and in the moment's silence which always follows a fall, he turned ashen white.

"Are you hurt?" he asked. "I hope you are not hurt."

Poor Regina was a little stunned by the shock, and could not answer at once, but she pulled herself together, and to Hamish's great relief said—

"I don't think I'm hurt, only my arm; it's rather"——

Regina did not wish to cry, but all her efforts were fruitless to prevent a quick sob.

"I say, I am very sorry," Hamish said, ringing his little bell with great vigour. "It was all my fault."

His bell brought Sophy, who was in charge in the nursery, the upper servants having gone to church. But in another minute the footsteps of the whole family were heard, and Sophy ran downstairs to greet Lady Stuart with the intelligence that Miss Randall had fallen down and broken her arm!

Lady Stuart hastened to the schoolroom, where poor Hamish lay with a pale, frightened face, and Regina was curled up in a heap on the floor, gasping out, "I'm not really hurt."

Lady Stuart raised her gently, and took her on her knee, and soothed and kissed her.

Bertha stood by very much concerned, and Agnes began to cry and lament over her "darling Regina."

"Does your arm hurt you, dear?" Lady Stuart asked.

"Only when I move it," Regina sobbed; "it's not much pain."

Lady Stuart drew up the sleeve of the little blue check, which was worn that day for the first time, and gently moved the poor arm up and down.

"It's not broken," she said, "that is quite clear. Come with me to my room, and I will bathe it for you till Mrs. Clarke comes in from church. I think

there will be a black bruise to-morrow, but nothing more serious."

Regina suffered herself to be led away by Lady Stuart, and Bertha ran off to find Rex and tell him what had happened.

Hamish was very much distressed, though he did not cry and make so much moan as Agnes did. He asked Sophy to wheel him back to the nursery, and Agnes was left alone in the schoolroom.

Regina's desk stood on the table, the key in the lock.

Agnes was naturally inquisitive, and felt a strong desire to turn the key in that "monster desk," as she called it, and see what it contained. There was never in Agnes's mind any strong and high desire to resist what was wrong, no thought of looking for the help of God in the moment of temptation.

"I'll just look in," she said to herself. "There is no harm in looking. Besides, Regina is sure to show me everything in her desk."

If there really was no harm in turning the key, it was odd how Agnes started at the sound in the next room, of Sophy shutting the door and of a footstep in the passage; odd, too, that when the desk opened and the upper part fell back with a quick thud on the table, Agnes should be so frightened that she hastily shut it and retreated towards the door. But no one was there, and nothing came to disturb her, so that,

on the second attempt, the desk was gently opened, and the copybook containing Regina's journal lay on the top.

But in lifting this book, Agnes caught sight of the two sealed packets, with the writing on the thick yellowish writing-paper in which they were wrapped.

Here, indeed, was a secret—a mystery. What could be inside these packets? Not to be opened till Regina was eighteen. Seven years—as if any one could wait seven years! And what nonsense it was! Agnes had actually taken up the packet of letters, and was regarding it curiously when this time advancing steps were really heard. Agnes had only just time to thrust the parcels back, cover them with the copybook containing the journal, and close the desk. In so doing, the little key dropped out of the lock and disappeared. Agnes groped on the floor for it in vain. The light was fading, and it was nearly dark. The key was not to be found.

"What have you dropped, Miss Agnes?" It was Nurse's voice.

"Oh, nothing; only my glove."

"Her Ladyship's left her pocket-handkerchief here. Have you seen it?"

"No," said Agnes absently. "How is Miss Randall, Nurse?"

"Gone to bed, and Mrs. Clarke says no one is

to disturb her, on no account. Here comes Mrs. Clarke."

"I wanted Miss Regina's desk, if you please," Nurse said. "She wishes to have it in her room."

"Well, it's a great cumbersome thing, and I am sure it isn't wanted here," said Nurse. "You are welcome to take it."

And Mrs. Clarke departed with her property. The desk closed so well that she did not notice it was not locked; and Regina having locked it, made no inquiry. She was a good deal shaken with her fall, and her arm was painful, and she was glad to be left to go to sleep. She lay between sleeping and waking, listening to the sound of the hymns which Lady Stuart and the whole household were singing at prayers. The voices, mellowed by distance, were very sweet, and Rex's boyish treble was Regina felt soothed and comdistinct and clear. forted; for the first time a sense of home came over her. It was almost worth the pain of her arm and the heavy fall to be so cared for by Lady Stuart. Gentle caresses and sympathy were so new to her, and the idea of what she had called "religion," coming so naturally from Lady Stuart as a part of herself, and belonging to her in everyday things, was equally fresh and strange. Sunday had been to Regina a day of shadows and gloom—a day when she accompanied Mrs. Turnbull twice to church; not St. Michael's, which was opposite the Bank, but a church in a remote part of the town, which Mrs. Turnbull preferred.

The prayers and sermon were a blank form to Regina. She dreamed her own dreams all the time; and very often in the deep pew, enclosed in its green baize with brass nails, Regina's day-dreams were lost in sleep.

This first Sunday at Barrow Court had been very different. The Gospel for the day and the Collect, explained by Lady Stuart, gave the service a reality, and so did Mr. Goodwin's sermon.

It was a picture of the raising of the widow's son at Nain, drawn by a master's hand, and awaking in Regina's little heart a great yearning sympathy and interest she had not known before.

When the singing had ceased in the dining-room, where Lady Stuart always assembled the household for prayers, Regina closed her eyes, and was just falling into a doze, when she heard a sound in the room. She started up, and by so doing hurt her arm.

"Who is it?" she asked, in a frightened voice.

"It's only I—Agnes," was the answer. "I am so miserable about you, dearest."

"I thought," Regina said, "I heard some one locking my desk."

"It was I putting the key into the lock. I found it on the floor of the schoolroom; that is why I came."

- "Oh, thank you," Regina said, falling back on her pillow. "That is all right."
 - "Does your arm hurt you much?" Agnes asked.
- "Not when I am quiet. I think I only want to go to sleep now."

Agnes came near, and throwing herself on the bed by Regina, said, "I don't feel as if you loved me as much as I expected."

- "Oh, yes, I do," said poor Regina. "Only at first I feel rather strange, you know."
- "Hush! don't speak above a whisper. I don't want anybody to know I am here. I should like to sleep with you, if I might, but there would be so much fuss made. Good-night, Regina."
 - "Good-night," said Regina in a sleepy voice.
- "Don't say anything about my coming here with the key, will you?"
- "No!" said Regina, much wondering why Agnes asked this.

And now another voice was heard at the door, Lady Stuart's.

- "Who is talking to Regina? I so particularly said that no one was to go to her room. Agnes, is that you?"
- "I was so anxious about Regina, mamma. I did so want to see her, and hear how her arm was. I could not go to sleep without knowing."
 - "It was very disobedient, Agnes," Lady Stuart

said in a low voice, which betrayed her vexation. "Come away immediately."

Regina did not like to speak, and lay quite still, but she was turning over in her mind for a long time how it was that Agnes could say anything about her arm brought her to her room.

"She told me it was because she found the key of my desk. I don't understand Agnes quite. I hope she tells the truth, and does not deceive me."

Alas! poor Agnes! There was in her that most sad, and, in its consequences, that most fatal of all inclinations to evil—want of truth. Rex called it shuffling; Hamish, downright falsehood; Bertha, "stories." But by whatever name it is called, it is a fault which of all others causes the greatest sorrow to ourselves, and trouble to others.

Constant watchfulness and prayer are the only weapons with which this enemy of peace can be fought. Lady Stuart, with the love which never failed, felt that her inability to trust Agnes was one of her greatest trials with these children committed to her care, and earnestly did she pray that she might meet the trial wisely and firmly, and yet tenderly and patiently.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER THE FIRS.

REGINA was well enough to begin her schoolroom work the next day, though her bruised arm was in a sling and her shoulder was very stiff.

Work alone and work in company are very different things. Regina felt the confusion of novelty, and the strangeness of the position made her seem more dreamy than usual. Mr. Goodwin put her through a short examination, giving her questions to answer in geography, history, and arithmetic. French he left to Monsieur de Vallerie, and Latin Regina had not begun.

While Regina sat with the papers before her, the others went on with the regular morning routine. From time to time Hamish looked across the table at the new pupil and wondered how she was getting on. Agnes, who had chosen to sit next Regina, now and then whispered in her ear some hint as to one of the questions, but Regina resolutely took no notice of her.

Mr. Goodwin's eyes were, as I have told you,

very sharp, and nothing was lost on him. When the lessons were over he said, "Let me see your work, Miss Regina."

Regina rose and went round to the master's chair with her papers.

"I can't do any better," she said in a mournful tone. "I am not used to it, I think. I am very sorry."

Mr. Goodwin looked at the three papers in order, arithmetic first. He drew his pencil over it—not one answer was right! Then came geography; that was only answered partially, but the answers were right. Next came history, and the first question occupied the whole of the page—" Mention the principal events in the reign of Henry the Eighth."

Mr. Goodwin read the answer with apparent interest. "Not one mistake in spelling. Composition remarkable," were Mr. Goodwin's unspoken remarks, and he scored it with a very decided "Good" with his pencil.

"You will do very well in time," he said to Regina; "now we will take dictation together."

Mr. Goodwin gave dictation in a manner peculiar to himself. He never read it from a book, but the poem, or essay, or quotation seemed to come naturally.

This was the first dictation which Regina wrote from Mr. Goodwin's lips. It made a deep impression

on her, and quickened her desire to read the works of the poet Cowper—that poet now considered perhaps to belong to a past age, and too little esteemed. The lines Mr. Goodwin gave for dictation were these:—

- "Horatio's servant once, with bow and cringe,
 Swinging the parlour door upon the hinge,
 Dreading a negative, and overawed
 Lest he should trespass, begged to go abroad.
 'Go, fellow! whither?' turning short about:
 'Nay, stop at home; you're always going out.'
 'It's but a step, sir, just at the street's end.'
 'For what?' 'An' please you, sir, to see a friend.'
 'A friend!' Horatio cried, with sudden start,
 'A we mark shelt thou and with all my heart.
 - Aye, marry, shalt thou, and with all my heart:
 And fetch my cloak, for, though the night be raw,
 I'll see him too—the first I ever saw.'"

Regina's dictation was nearly without a mistake, while all the rest had displayed a great variety in orthography.

"Did not the same man," Regina asked, as she saw Mr. Goodwin put "William Cowper" under the lines,—"Did not the same man write the hymn which begins 'The billows swell?"

"Yes, the same man," Mr. Goodwin said; "he had a turn for the pathetic and sorrowful as well as for the amusing and humorous."

"This is not true about the servant?" asked the matter-of-fact Rex.

"True! what nonsense!" Bertha said in an undertone; "just as if it could be true!"

"It is a play upon the fickleness of friends," Mr. Goodwin said; "it is no more true than 'John Gilpin.'"

"Cowper never wrote 'John Gilpin,'" exclaimed Agnes.

"I am afraid he did," was Mr. Goodwin's quiet reply; "and he spelt sudden with two 'd's,' Miss Agnes, and overawed with a 'w' and not with two 'r's;' and according to William Cowper the 'i' in friend precedes the 'e.'"

Agnes looked very much put out, and murmured something under her breath, which only Mr. Goodwin heard.

"It's a stupid thing to give for dictation."

"To the stupid all things are stupid, Miss Agnes," was the quiet retort.

There was always an hour and a half for recreation at Barrow Court after Mr. Goodwin left it, and the books were hastily put away.

The grounds were so large, and extended so far behind the house, that the children did not care to leave them. There were "bounds" marked out by Lady Stuart, and no one was allowed to go beyond them without leave.

Mrs. Gaze's cottage was the farthest limit towards the river, and a white gate at the top of the plantation was the boundary-line at the back of the Court. This white gate led from the shadow of the fir-trees to a heath covered with gorse and heather, and stretching in a wide plain towards an outlying village, where a lonely church raised an old grey tower above the far-stretching level.

To this gate Agnes, with her arm round Regina, led her on this fine morning.

Rex came whistling up behind them with his net, and Agnes, looking back, said—

"What a bore Rex is! We don't want him."

Regina did not agree to this assertion as warmly as Agnes wished, and when Rex really joined them, she turned and said—

"May I carry your tin box?"

"Oh, no, thank you," Rex replied. "You have only got one hand. I hope your arm does not hurt you much. What's the matter?" For Regina stopped suddenly, and seemed to be listening earnestly.

"That sound," she said, "is very pretty."

"What sound?"

"It is like the sea, but it is overhead."

"Why, it is the wind in the fir-trees!" exclaimed Agnes. "We always hear it; it's nothing."

It was a great deal to Regina, and she did wish Agnes would not chatter so much about her story. She did not care about Lady Belinda; it was nonsense. She would much rather listen to the music of the fir-trees.

The children went up to the white gate, and Regina looked over the wide expanse with delight, the gorse and heather covering it with a mantle of gold and purple, the butterflies and moths dancing in the crisp, sunshiny air, and away in the blue distance the old church, and a tiny wreath of blue smoke curling upwards in the still air, showed that some cottages lay in a dip of the moorland. Regina was opening the gate when Rex called out—

"No one is allowed to go beyond there without leave."

"Just a few steps," Agnes said, advancing; "mamma would not mind that."

"Oh, I would not go on any account," Regins said, stepping back.

Agnes, on the contrary, stepped forward and called out to Rex—

"Oh, there is such a splendid butterfly here; make haste, Rex, or you will be too late."

But Rex stood firm.

"I shan't come through the gate, so it is no use asking me," he said.

Then he resolutely turned away, and began to beat the hedge which separated the plantation from the field with the pole of his net.

A number of little moths fluttered out, but none were sufficiently attractive to capture. Rex

skirted the side of the hedge, beating the bushes and whistling as he went. Regina was left alone by the gate.

She soon lost herself in day-dreams, and forgot everything but the sweet sighing of the fir-trees, the distant lowing of cattle, and the twitter of the little yellowhammer as it said over and over, "A little bit of bread and no cheese!" The little bird with its bright gold breast and its striped wings was perched on a hazel bush just over her head, and Regina, looking up, could see it, as it trilled out its song to its mate, who answered faintly from an alder bush farther down the hedge.

Presently Regina heard Agnes's voice, "Rex! Regina! Rex!"

"What can be the matter?" Regina thought, leaning over the gate. The cry grew louder and more desperate, "Rex, O Rex!" But Rex had gone out of hearing, and Regina, opening the gate and looking across the heath, saw Agnes running towards her, the huge figure of a man, not running apparently, but with giant strides gaining fast upon the terrified girl.

Regina was very much frightened. What was the man saying to Agnes? What could he be saying to frighten her? Did he want to rob her, take her watch, or what?

Holding the gate open with one hand, the only

hand Regina could use, Agnes rushed through it, and calling Regina to follow, tore with hot haste down the path.

More haste less speed! She caught her foot in the trunk of a tree and fell flat on her face.

Although she scrambled up as quickly as possible, the momentary delay gave the man time to come up with her.

"I hope you ain't hurt, missie. What did you cut and run for?"

Agnes could not reply, she was so breathless and discomfited.

"Did you think I was a going to eat you?" was the next question. "Can I go on down this here path, missie?"

"It's private grounds," Agnes said. "Don't you see it on the board?"

"Oh, well then I'll turn back the way I came; that's the question I was asking you when you runned off like a rabbit. Beg your pardon, I'm sure."

Regina had recognised Amos before now, and tried to make Agnes understand that he was little Tim's friend. But Agnes began to descend the path as quickly as she could, and it was left to Regina to say—

"I think you must want to see the little boy in Mrs. Gaze's cottage, and Lady Stuart would not mind your coming the shortest way." "Thank you kindly, missie. You are just right. I do want to see the little chap. I've got baddish news to tell, for the little chap's father is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Regina, with the solemn emphasis with which we generally pronounce that word.

"Yes, dead sure enough. He was found lying in a fit a-top of the barge last evening just as we were pulling in to Norminster wharf. It was the drink killed him. If ever I take another drop, my name's not Amos Barnes."

They were all this time going down the plantation, Agnes far before them, and yet Regina felt no fear. Amos inspired confidence, and Regina wondered why Agnes had been so frightened.

Rough indeed was the outward man—large heavy boots, corduroy trousers, much too short and very wide, a thick blue jersey, in which were many cracks and rents, and a spotted red handkerchief loosely tied round his neck, completed Amos's attire, unless indeed a fur cap with a torn peak set on one side of his curly head be included. But the face looking out from under that cap was one where all truth and honesty were written.

Rex dashed out from a side-path, his net in his hand, and knew Amos at once as the poor fellow with the stiff arm who was so fond of little Tim.

Amos told his errand in a few homely words. He had gone "up country" to the village over the heath to find Luke Jones's old father-in-law, who was still alive, and to see about the "burying;" but it would cost a sight of money to bury Luke out there, and the old fellow was like a child; he did not care where the burying was.

The bell was ringing for the early dinner as Rex, and Amos, with Regina, reached the house. Agnes had arrived much before them, and had given so fearful an account of her being pursued by a giant, that Bertha's curiosity was roused, and all the servants, moved by the marvellous history, clustered round her to hear what had happened.

- "Was he after your watch, miss?" asked one.
- "Dear me! what a fright for you!" said another.

While Nurse, who always looked at things in a direct practical way, said—

"If you went through the gate at the top of the wood, it was against your mamma's orders; so you are in the wrong, Miss Agnes."

Lady Stuart, who had come down with Bunchie and Berry, was received by Agnes with a burst of crying. She had been so fearfully frightened; she had fallen down and scratched her face; she had seen such an awful-looking man!

"Nonsense, Agnes!" said Rex. "It is only that bargeman, mother, who is so fond of little Tim. He came to tell him his father is dead. Here he is: do speak to him."

Lady Stuart went out to the door at once and told Amos to go round to the kitchen and she would after dinner go with him to Gaze's cottage and tell Tim.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Amos. "How is the little chap?"

"Better, we hope, really better," said Lady Stuart.

"The poor lonely little boy! I wonder how he will take this news?"

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Amos again.
"But he'll never be lonely while I've a crust to share with him." And then Amos turned and followed Rex to the back premises.

CHAPTER XXV.

COURT AND COTTAGE.

Tim cried a good deal when he was told of his father's death. He had a tender little heart, and he would have willingly borne blows and illusage if it could have restored his father to life again. Child-like, he had very little concern about his future. The "Sarah Anne" had been his only home, and he expected, when he got well, he should go back again and lead the old life with Amos. Getting well was a long way off; the little emaciated form was still as helpless as a baby's, and Mrs. Gaze tended him, as she expressed it, "like an infant not twelve hours old." All this "tending" had touched a soft place in Mrs. Gaze's heart, and she forgot to grumble about dirty foot-marks on her spotless floors and other inconveniences in the pleasure she felt in seeing Tim getting better. The pleasure was a surprise to Mrs. Gaze; and it is a pleasure which is 80 new to those who experience it for the first time, the pleasure of ministering to others and living out of

themselves, that it is no wonder it produces astonishment!

Amos interested Lady Stuart as much as Tim. It was touching to see him looking down on the little boy and saying—

- "Don't you fret; I'll be as good a father to you as ever I can. I'll have the 'Sarah Anne' cleaned up, and"——
- "Amos," whispered Tim, "Amos, was poor father very sorry to die?"
- "Don't know, Tim, my boy. I can't say; he was took for death all of a sudden; but, Tim, 'twas the drink did it."
 - "We won't touch the drink, Amos."
 - "No, that we won't, boy, nor smell it."
- "But, oh! dear," moaned little Tim, "I wish I'd been kinder to poor father; I might have been more partic'lar about peeling the 'taters.' He could not bear 'em in their jackets."
- "You was a good boy to him, Tim; don't you fear, and don't fret."

Lady Stuart left the two friends together, and found Rex waiting for her.

- "Did he mind much, mother?" Rex asked.
- "He scarcely understands what has happened," Lady Stuart said; "but the poor child seems to have had affection for his father, in spite of what he has suffered."

"It would be strange to have a father like that," Rex said: "it's hard to understand it all."

"Yes, very hard, Rex," his mother answered; "but one thing is not hard to see—that when we are near those who need our help, we must try to give it. I am going to get Mr. Goodwin to assist me to open a room in Barrow for the barge people on Sundays. They do not like to go to church or chapel, where every one is so well dressed, but I hope to be able to persuade them to come to my room. I am going up to the Rectory now to see Mr. Goodwin, for something must be done about the poor bargeman's funeral, and I will talk to him about my plans. Will you come with me, Rex?"

Rex was very glad to have the honour of a walk with his mother alone, and they talked happily and freely together, as Lady Stuart never felt she could talk with the girls.

"You like your lessons with Mr. Goodwin, Rex?" Lady Stuart asked.

"Yes, very much. He is pretty strict, and given to say sharp things; but he is jolly enough, and I never understood my work before."

"Hamish, dear Hamish, does he get on, do you think?"

"I should say he did," was Rex's answer; "it is wonderful how much he has done in a short time. Bertha works very hard for her." "And Agnes?" Rex was silent, and said, after a pause, rather gruffly—

"Oh, she is all right, I daresay; but I don't know so much about Agnes. She seems very thick with Regina. Mother, don't you like Regina very much?"

"Yes, very much, Rex. I hope she will be happy with us. Do you think she is happy, Rex?"

"This is only her first day in the schoolroom," Rex said, "and it was unlucky she had that fall and hurt her arm. You don't want me to come into the Rectory with you, do you, mother? So I'll go home and see what Hamish is doing."

He was gone with a flying leap over a stile leading into a field-path, and Lady Stuart turned to watch him.

"Dear, unselfish boy!" she thought, "what a blessing he is to me, and what an example for my Bernard to follow!"

Mr. Goodwin had seen Lady Stuart at the gate, and came down the path to meet her.

"Welcome!" he said. "I have been successful in getting that room close to the landing-place, not for love, but for a trifling sum, though the man to whom it belongs said he knew no good would come of talking to barge folk; they were a bad lot."

Lady Stuart laughed.

"Poor barge folk," she said, "there is no one to

give them a good name." And then she told Mr. Goodwin of Luke Jones's sudden death, and asked him to see Amos about the funeral.

Miss Goodwin and her mother were not at home, and Lady Stuart went into the study with the Rector. It was a small low room filled with books from the floor to the ceiling, and with no other ornament but a beautiful portrait of a boy with a frank open face and curling hair.

- "How like Rex!" Lady Stuart thought; and as if interpreting her thoughts, Mr. Goodwin said—
 - "You see the likeness?"
 - "Yes, it is too striking to pass unnoticed."
- "Rex is like him in many things," Mr. Goodwin said. "I pray God he may be spared to his father and to you."
- "I have not had an opportunity of asking you about the children," Lady Stuart said almost timidly.
- "It is too soon to pronounce any very decided judgment," Mr. Goodwin said. "One of them gives me a little uneasiness."

Lady Stuart waited. She did not wish to suggest which of the children. Mr. Goodwin also paused, then he went straight to the point.

"I do not think Miss Agnes is quite direct and straightforward. Those sums were not done, easy as they were, while some much more complicated ones were correct. I have a suspicion amounting to a certainty that the correct sums were copied from a book, where her sister and Rex had at my request made a fair copy of the sums."

Lady Stuart did not speak, but her face showed so much distress that Mr. Goodwin went on—

"I am almost sorry I mentioned this, only deceit and shuffling are sure to spread rapidly unless an effort is made to stamp them out. This sort of thing would destroy any chance of my being of use to the child herself, and no one can tell where it would end."

"You are quite right to tell me," Lady Stuart said. "I must think over what is best to say to poor Agnes." And as Lady Stuart walked home, pity was the feeling uppermost in her heart—more pity than anger; but she must show her sense of the sinfulness of sin, though she wished to treat the one who sinned gently and lovingly.

The children were all in the schoolroom after tea, preparing their lessons, Regina seated before her large desk writing an essay on printing, the subject Mr. Goodwin had given them.

An excellent memory for anything that interested her helped Regina to gather up many little details which went far to make a good essay.

The cut letters on the trunk of a tree, which first struck Gutenburg, then the treachery of Faust, the spread of the idea to England, the first printing press set up by William Caxton, all these details came in well; but the winding up was the most remarkable part.

"Printing was like the dawn of day, for it brought the thoughts of clever people to brighten dull ones, and without printing we should never have had the Bible in every home. It was like the dawn of day, because it helped every one to see the beautiful things which God has taught us in His Word."

"Let me look at what you have written," Hamish said. "May I?" as Regina leaned on her desk as if resting from her labours. "Do let me see your essay!"

Regina blushed.

"It is not very good or worth reading," she said.

"It's longer than mine, anyhow," said Rex. "Listen!"

"'Printing is done by smearing rough letters with ink, and then rolling paper over them.'"

"That's practical enough," said Hamish, laughing.
'Now then, Bertha, read yours."

"Printing is a wonderful art," Bertha began. "In old days all books were written with a pen, on a sort of thick paper called vellum or parchment, and rich people ordered copies, but poor people could not have any."

"That's all at present," said Bertha.

"I call that first-rate," exclaimed Rex heartily. "Now then, Agnes."

"Oh, I have not begun yet. I had something else to finish. It is very easy to write about printing."

"It will be time to go into the drawing-room directly," Bertha said; "so you had better make haste."

There was another silence of a quarter of an hour, and then it was time for the girls to dress to go downstairs. Two or three friends had been dining with Lady Stuart, and she wished the children to be in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Some one must stay with Hamish," Agnes said, as the others were shutting up their desks. "I can't go down to-night."

"Regina is going to stay," Hamish said; "her arm hurts her when she raises it."

"Miss Agnes, will you come and get ready, if you please, to go into the drawing-room?" said Nurse. "It is quite time, and her Ladyship likes you to be in the drawing-room when the ladies come up from dinner."

"What a bother!" said Agnes. "Why can't you go, Regina, or send Puck instead of me? He will do just as well with a blue ribbon tied round his neck."

"Come, Miss Agnes, don't stand talking there, when you know you've got to change your dress."

"For two or three old frumps; it is not worth while," pouted Agnes. But finding resistance was useless, she reluctantly followed Nurse.

"She has not touched her essay again. She will be taking something out of a book," murmured Hamish. "But we won't talk about her; we will talk about something else."

Regina was quite ready, and calling Puck to her lap, she sat down by Hamish's sofa, feeling honoured that he liked to talk to her.

As she drew the low chair closer, she struck her bruised arm against the corner of the sofa, and gave a sudden exclamation of pain.

"Did it hurt much?" Hamish asked.

"Oh, no; it was only for a minute. I can't think how you bear your pain," she said.

"I have not had nearly so much lately," he said quickly, for he never liked to talk about his pain. "You've been here two days; how are you getting on?"

"Oh, very well, thank you! I only hope I shall get on with my lessons; but you heard to-day how stupid I was."

"At some things perhaps," said Hamish honestly, "but you know you are not really stupid, but cleverer than any of us. You think, and we do; your thoughts are all fresh, and not like books or people, but only like yourself."

"You are laughing at me," said Regina.

"No, I am not; your 'Song of the River,' for instance." The words slipped out before he was aware of it, and he said, "I say, I didn't mean to tell you, but it is out now."

Regina's face was scarlet, her eyes dilated, her whole attitude expressed indignation and something more!

"How could Agnes show my letter to you? Oh, it was too unkind! I did not wish any one to see it but her, and I told her so."

"I am very sorry," Hamish said; "but I read the 'Song of the River.' So did mother; but I don't think you need mind; we liked it, and it pleased us. I don't think you need mind, except that Agnes had no business to show what was private."

"It is that I mind," exclaimed Regina. "I can't think what Lady Stuart must have thought of me, sending what Nurse—Clarke I mean—calls 'rub-bish.'"

"It's not rubbish; it's very clever, and not at all like other stories. Why, we might try for a year, and such thoughts would never come into our heads. But I am sorry I told you I had read the 'Song of the River,' if it makes you unhappy. Let's talk of something else." And then Hamish began to describe the particular beauty of the "underwing" which he had painted that afternoon, and then he told

Regina she might fetch his case from the nursery, and he showed her all his collection of butterflies on paper, which were really wonderful, and excited Regina's keen admiration.

They were interrupted at last by Bertha.

"Hamish, Mrs. St. John wishes particularly to see you. She knows father very well, and she wants to come up. Mother sent me to tell you."

"I won't see her," said Hamish passionately; "I won't be gazed at by a curious old woman. I say it's a shame. I won't. Stop her coming, Bertha."

Hamish was so much excited that Regina felt half frightened.

"Run, Bertha, run and stop the old woman," he cried.

Bertha departed, and scampering downstairs, rushed into the drawing-room with the news that Hamish was in a very bad temper, and said he would not see Mrs. St. John.

"Very well, my dear," said the old lady; "cripples are often very sensitive, I know."

CHAPTER XXVL

RAINY DAYS.

THAT night, when Agnes was in bed, she heard a step she knew to be Lady Stuart's, and starting up, she exclaimed—

"Is that you, mamma?"

"Yes, Agnes; lie down. I came to say something to you which it is painful to say, but I must not shrink from it, Agnes. Mr. Goodwin fears—I might almost say knows—that you were not honest about those sums, and that you took the corrected ones from the book where Rex and Bertha copy theirs. Mr. Goodwin says"——

"Mamma," Agnes exclaimed, "how can you say such cruel things! It is all Mr. Goodwin's spite; he never liked me from the first. Oh, it is a shame!"

And Agnes took refuge in tears and sobs. These did not convince Lady Stuart of her innocence, and she went on to speak sadly and seriously of the sin of deceit. She begged Agnes to confess the truth to

her and to God, and not to treat lightly an act which was so hateful in His sight.

Lady Stuart found she could make but little real impression. Agnes cried, and begged her to kiss her, and said she loved her dearly, and that she was the best and kindest of mothers; but she made no confession of having copied the sums.

Agnes's conscience told her that there were many other little deceitful acts which ought to be confessed and repented; but she could not bring herself to lose every one's good opinion by allowing herself to be guilty.

Lady Stuart knelt by the bed and prayed silently for poor Agnes, and for herself, that she might be guided aright, and she repeated aloud the prayer which we all hear every Sunday, which asks Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid, to cleanse the very thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.

"You won't kiss me! you don't love me!" Agnes sobbed as Lady Stuart moved to leave the room.

"You know, Agnes, I love you, perhaps with the greater love now I know that you are so weak in the hour of temptation, but I cannot seem to pass over an offence like yours lightly. If you can tell me to-morrow that you are really sorry and repentant, I shall never refer to this subject again; but if you persist in saying you are innocent, I must

mark my sense of your faults in some way that you will feel. Good-night!"

Agnes soon dried her tears after Lady Stuart had left her. She was sufficiently ashamed of herself to determine that she would not in future try to deceive Mr. Goodwin, but she was not really sorry; and so the unrepented sin was, like a weed in the garden of her heart, cut down perhaps for the time, but not rooted out, and to bear perhaps a more bitter fruit than she then would have believed possible.

The next week was hopelessly wet, and Agnes were rather an injured air, and was quieter and more subdued. Regina was full of sympathy when she told her that she had "a great trouble" and was very unhappy; that no one loved her, and that she wished she could go back to Mrs. Smith's at Cheltenham.

"I can't think how you can wish to do that," Regina said. "It must be so much nicer to live in a home like this. I wish it was my home."

"You'll soon change your mind," Agnes said with a sigh—"very soon. I have altered my plans about my story. I intend to write my own instead of Lady Belinda's. I have stuck fast in it, and I think I can make a very interesting tale like a diary. You keep a diary, don't you?"

Regina said "Yes," but she rather wondered how Agnes knew it. "Perhaps I told her," she thought. "I don't think diaries are meant for other people's use. I am so sorry you showed my river story to Hamish."

"I did not think you would mind, but I won't show anything you write again."

"Regina, do come here," Rex called from heights above; "it is such fun! Mother has given me the keys of the great chests in the garrets, and she says we may all go and turn them out."

Bertha came flying from the schoolroom at this news, and Regina was following her up the wide staircase when she heard little voices below, "Let Bunchie come!" and "Let Berry come!"

"Oh, no!" Bertha called from the upper landing, looking over the bannisters, "the little ones must not come. I am sure they must not. Go back, Bunchie and Berry, go back to Nurse."

Poor Bunchie did not see the justice of this and began to cry. Of course Berry did the same, and Sophy came out from the nursery to take them back by Nurse's order.

"I will take great care of them," Regina said; "please let them come."

"My dear Miss Regina," exclaimed Nurse, as she came on the scene of action, "you ain't used to looking after children; leave it alone."

"Why, one would think it was the North Pole I wanted to go to," said Rex, who had heard the discussion. I'll come down and carry Berry on my

back, and Sophy can take Bunchie; and all of you come, Nurse and all. You'll like to see the curiosities. There's a heap of finery and lots of odd things."

Rex had Berry on his back in a moment, taking no notice of his sister's exclamation—

"We don't want the children; they'll only pull things about."

"We'll dress them up and make a what-do-you-call-it; not a charade—a still thing—a picture. Then we'll call mother to see it."

Rex's glowing description of the "curiosities" drew the servants to follow him, and very soon the floor of the wide garret presented a mass of many-coloured confusion.

The servants were interested in spite of themselves; and though Nurse now and then exclaimed, "Who is to clear it all away, I should like to know?" she was as full of wonder and admiration as anyone.

- "Let's all dress up and go down and show mother and Hamish," Rex said.
- "Oh, that will be fun!" exclaimed Bertha; "only there are such heaps of things, one does not know what to choose."
- "I'll have that red velvet jacket," said Agnes, "and the spangled vest."
- "No, I want that," said Bertha. "Don't take all the best things."

"I wonder who wore these things," said Regina thoughtfully. "How sorry they would be to see all their grand clothes pulled about like this! Look at this gown, all silver and yellow."

"Dear me, that's what you call brocade; it is a lovely pattern. Look at the white doves on it," said Nurse, "and the leaves and grapes. Why, it will pretty near stand alone."

"There's something pinned inside it—a yellow paper. What is on it?"

The writing was very faint and faded with age, but the characters were legible.

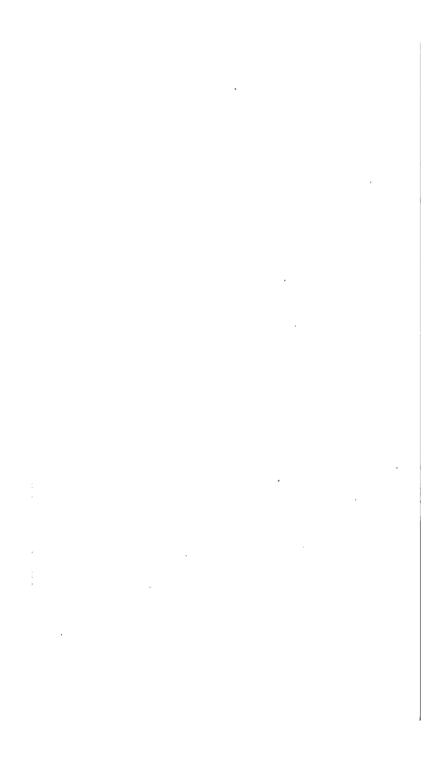
Bertha took it and read, "Gold and silver Venetian brocade dress, worn on her marriage and at the Queen's ball by Lady Jemima Stuart, A.D. 1777."

"Why, that is an enormous time ago, and yet it looks as fresh and good as new. We'll dress Regina in that; it looks fit for her," said Rex.

The stiff brocade was put over Regina's head, and fell like a hoop over her little figure, then a lace cape was crossed over her body, and a sort of black velvet turban edged with pearls set on her raven hair, a shawl fastened on for a train, and the dress was declared complete for the queen. Then the king was made with an old, much moth-eaten green coat, and (most delightful discovery of all) a wig was found in one of the chests—a real bag-wig fastened with a ribbon.



" We'll dress Regina in that; it looks fit for her," said Re. .. -Page 248.



Agnes and Bertha, with Sophy's help, were covered with finery, and Bunchie and Berry were also dressed up. And when the procession was ready, headed by the king and queen—Rex and Regina indeed—the best part of all was to come,— "surprising Lady Stuart and Hamish."

Sophy was sent forward as a scout to see if Lady Stuart was in the schoolroom with Hamish, but she returned with the news that Master Hamish had been carried down into the drawing-room.

"Oh, well, let us go in," said Rex; "it will amuse them. Let us see! The little ones first, then the king and queen, then the ladies of what do you call it?—honour."

On they went, the quaint procession, the young faces looking out from the old garments, faded and worn, and each with an unspoken story of some vanished time. On they went down the long staircase—Puck keeping well to the front—across the black and white checks of the hall pavement to the drawing-room, where Rex gave a thump at the door, over Bunchie's head, with a long silver-headed cane which had been found in the chest, and Lady Stuart said—

"Come in;" adding, "Who can that be?"

Bunchie had been instructed to say, "The King and Queen of the Barrow Islands," and she marched

in with the greatest composure, speaking the words with her wonted distinctness and slowness.

"The King and Queen of the Barrow," then came a great sigh, and "Islands" came out amidst the laughter of the inhabitants of the drawing-room, who were two grave doctors, Dr. Kemble and Mr. Moore, Hamish and Lady Stuart.

"My dear children, where did you get all those things?"

"May it please your Highness," Agnes began.

"Nonsense," said Rex in a whisper. "We are 'Highness' to them, not they to us."

"We are come to pay you a friendly visit, madam; and, gentlemen," said Rex, "we did not expect to be greeted by laughter."

"They ought to be photographed," said Dr. Kemble.
"Who are they all?"

"The Queen is Regina Randall," Lady Stuart said.

"Is it possible? I know Her Majesty very well, for I have seen her at the Bank-house. What a transformation! You will be glad to hear that Mr. Turnbull writes a better account of himself to me," he said, laying his hand on Regina's shoulder. "I daresay you have heard from Mr. Turnbull?"

"No, I have not," Regina answered. "I am glad Cousin Andrew is better."

Mr. Moore had been directing his attention to

Bunchie and Berry; and when the doctors had left the room the children were all examined by Hamish and Lady Stuart.

"They really are valuable things," Lady Stuart said. "When I gave you the keys, Rex, I had no idea what you would find."

"May we make a tableau, mamma," Agnes asked, "and invite people to see it?"

"Not till the Christmas holidays, my dear Agnes. Then, if all goes well, and you are good children, we will have plenty of amusement, and tableaux amongst them."

"And will you ask the Smiths, mamma—will you? You half promised," Bertha said. "Do quite promise."

"We must wait till nearer the time," Lady Stuart said.

She was looking at Agnes, with all her golden hair let down over her shoulders (hair was plaited lightly in those days, or tucked into a net), and her delicate profile thrown out by the long veil at the back of her head. And she was thinking how sad it was that the shadow of deceit should hang over that fair exterior. She looked so grave and sad that little Bunchie said—

"Don't you think us very funny, mamma?" and Berry echoed, "Very funny!"

Lady Stuart caught the little quaint figure in her

arms and covered as much of the face as could be seen under a big satin hood with kisses, saying, "Mother thinks you do look very funny, darling."

"Was it a s'prise for you, mother, was it?"

"A very great surprise," Lady Stuart said, "and Hamish will have one for us soon, only that is a secret. Bunchie."

Regina had guessed that secret already, for she saw lying on Hamish's couch a pair of crutches with pretty handles covered with red velvet. Hamish saw that she had found them out, and calling her to him, said in a whisper—

"Don't notice it. I've walked across the room with Dr. Kemble."

"I am glad," Regina said, and her eyes expressed more than her words.

The procession now moved off. Rex got permission to parade the house and show off to the servants before he and his subjects disrobed. Then the trains and brocaded skirts, veils and turbans, spangles and velvets, were shut up again in the deep chests, and the voices of the children died away in the distance, and silence reigned once more in the long garret with its low beams and sloping roof and little dormer windows.

"What fun it has been!" said the children, as they raced downstairs to the schoolroom to begin their preparation for the next day.

"I wonder who Lady Jemima was," thought Regina, "who wore that stiff dress. Was she pretty and tall? She could not have been very tall, for the gown was not much too long for me. Lady Jemima!"

Regina's head was so full of the brocade and the finery, or rather of the people who wore them, that she did not get on with her lessons.

Mr. Goodwin's silent disapproval the next day was evident, and he asked sharply what she meant by writing nonsense, pushing back a very bad dictation, not as regards spelling, for, as we know, Regina could spell easily, but "Jemima" and "brocade" came in very oddly instead of "Jamaica" and "Borneo." The red pencil was dashed across the page and "Inattentive" written at the foot.

CHAPTER XXVIL

BY THE FIRESIDE.

Cold set in with the continuous wet weather, and the children at Barrow Court were rather melancholy.

"Will the rain never stop?" Bertha said disconsolately one afternoon. "I have not been out of the house for a week."

Agnes, who was rocking herself to and fro with face-ache, pitied herself more than any one else, and was, to say the least of it, very cross. Rex, who was sneezing every minute, tried to keep up the spirits of the party by drawing out a plan for Christmas tableaux, while Regina was helping him by suggestions, and a draft sheet was drawn out with characters and scenes. The Smiths, who were coming with Christmas, had their parts "supposed," and Hamish's remark, "Suppose they don't come at all," was disregarded.

Presently a tap was heard, and Bunchie came demurely in.

- "Run away, Bunch; we are all so busy we don't want you."
- "Rex wants me," said little Blanche, certain of her ground.
- "Of course I do, but not to give you my cold, and——" A fit of sneezing stopped Rex.
- "Oh, get away, Blanche," said Agnes, "you tiresome child, when my pain is so bad. Oh, dear!"
 - "Have a pepper plaister," said Rex promptly.
- "You are so unfeeling! Nobody cares how I suffer. Pepper plaister indeed!"
- "Shall I go and ask Nurse to make you a camomile-flower one?" said Regina. "I know I had one once and it did me good."
- "You've got the toothache," said Hamish. "All the plaisters in the world won't do it any good till the tooth is taken out."
- "I was awake all night," said Agnes in a wailing voice. "I never closed my eyes."
- "Oh, yes, Agnes, you did. You were sound asleep when I came to bed," Bertha exclaimed.
 - "I was not," said Agnes crossly. "Do be quiet!"
- "Such a fuss about a toothache!" said Hamish.
 "I wonder what she would say if she had a day of my pain."

Regina had gone out of the room to find Nurse, and ask her to make Agnes a poultice. But Nurse took the same view of Agnes's face-ache as Hamish Then she darted off to the schoolroom to draw the old leather chair to the fire, and put before it a large footstool covered with worsted work in shaded squares, and as she did this she said—

"Lady Stuart is coming to read to us."

"Oh, I hope it will be something interesting. I hope it won't be about Tim and the barge people; I am so sick of them," moaned Agnes from under the flannels which Nurse had bound round her head.

"Push my sofa a little nearer the fire, Rex," Hamish said. "And send Bunchie away. Berry must want her."

"Berry is asleep," said Bunchie. "He don't want me at all; his headache aches."

"You shall stay, old Bunchie," said Rex, "if you are quiet while mother is reading."

"I'll be as quiet as"-

Bunchie did not finish her comparison, for she took one of her tumbles from the square footstool, and was picked up by Rex and lifted into the big chair to await her mother's coming.

"Well, children," Lady Stuart said brightly; "so it has been a very dull afternoon. My poor Agnes, you would be better in bed, I think. You must be very careful of draughts when the flannel is taken off." Then she stooped down and kissed Agnes's forehead, bent over Hamish for a moment, and said, as she took Bunchie on her knee, "Shall I begin?"

- "Can you see to read, mother? Oh, it is not a book then. Is it your own story?"
- "No, not my own, that is to say, it is not about me and my five troublesome children."
- "I am not a troublesome child, mother," said Bunchie plaintively.
 - "No, my sweet; mother is only joking."
- "Mother is only joking," Bunchie repeated, nestling her dear little head against Lady Stuart's breast with infinite content.

When every one was settled, and Puck had curled himself up and uncurled himself at least a dozen times before he could get the precisely comfortable position for his nose which he desired, Lady Stuart said—

- "I am going to read the story of Lady Jemima's 'Old Brocade.'"
- "Why, I was thinking of that story," said Regina, "and how much all these old things could say. They have been lying shut up so long; how odd it must be to come out again."
- "As if they felt or thought," said Bertha. "I don't understand what you mean in the least, only mamma is sure to make something interesting out of it all."
- "Who was Lady Jemima Stuart, mamma?" asked Agnes.
- "That is exactly what I cannot tell you. I must ask papa; he will know. I think she must have

been your grandfather's first wife. I know I remember to have heard that he lost a young and beautiful wife, who was the daughter of an Irish nobleman."

"How tiresome!" exclaimed Bertha, for the footman came to say Miss Goodwin was in the drawingroom.

"Fancy her coming out in this downpour! I wonder who brought her here. I am sure we don't want her," murmured Agnes.

"I am sure we do," said Lady Stuart. "Go down, Regina, and ask Miss Goodwin if she will come upstairs and join our schoolroom tea."

"But it will stop our hearing the story, and that will be a nuisance," said Hamish.

But Regina, who had always an interest in Miss Goodwin, was gone, and had soon put her hand into Miss Goodwin's, saying—

"Will you mind coming up into the schoolroom? Lady Stuart is reading, or was going to read to us, something very interesting."

. "I shall be delighted to come. This is Regina's hand, I am sure," she said, raising it to her lips. "I have been down to visit Tim, and my maid, who led me here, says he looks much better."

"You are to stay to tea in the schoolroom, if you won't mind," Regina said.

"Oh, if I do that I must send my maid home,

and ask my father to come for me in an hour or two."

"Rex will walk home with you, I know," said Regina. "Shall I tell the maid? She is sitting in the hall."

With her hand in Regina's arm Miss Goodwin went through the hall, told her maid she was not to wait for her, and then, with the slow uncertain step of the blind in a strange place, she mounted the stairs to the schoolroom.

Lady Stuart welcomed her warmly, and Sophy appearing with the tea, the children had to wait for their story.

It was a tax on their patience, but Miss Goodwin made herself so cheerful and amusing, that they were well repaid in the end. She entered heartily into the history of the old chest in the attic, and into the proposed Christmas tableaux, and was so merry and bright, that it was hard for the children to believe the eyes, hidden by drooping eyelids and long curled lashes, were sightless.

Every other faculty had apparently been quickened, and Miss Goodwin was one of the many blind people who are happier than those who can see. I sometimes think God gives to them a beauty of mental vision and pictures of the mind of which we, who take our ideas from outward things, know nothing. However that may be, "He does make the blind to see" in a way peculiar to Himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE CHEST.

As soon as tea was over and Bunchie had departed to bed, Lady Stuart opened the pages of a closely written book and read—

THE STORY OF THE OLD GOLD BROCADE.

Silence had reigned in the attics for many years. The gold brocade had forgotten how many; indeed all idea of time had forsaken her. The little mice came out on moonlight nights and danced round the old chest where the old brocade lay, and wondered what was in it, and asked the pair of grey-whiskered rats if they knew, but the rats whisked their tails contemptuously and said they neither knew nor cared. They had tried the iron chest with their sharp teeth privately, but it only gave them the toothache and did not satisfy their curiosity. Still they were careful not to let the mice know that part of it.

The rain fell on the roof and dripped from a wide waterspout with a lion's face on the leaden and brick parapet which ran round the top of the house outside, and the wind came blustering against the four little dormer windows on wild autumn nights, but no other sounds broke the stillness. No wonder the old brocade, and her friend the gold-headed cane, and her acquaintances the pearl beads in a round black box, spent their time in drowsy unconcern of what happened in the outer world.

One day, when the rain had been falling in a continuous deluge for a week and the waterspout had discharged it in a stream rather than by drops, the brocade woke to the consciousness that something had happened.

- "Is this an earthquake?" the cane asked in his little creaky voice.
 - "I am sure I don't know," said the brocade.
- "It's a storm," said the pearls in their box, rattling the news with a sound like grape-shot. "It must be a storm, or we have got convulsions."

Then, before the old brocade could reply, she felt herself seized and shaken, and the box of pearls rolled out on the floor, and the cane knocked his head against the side of the chest and lay insensible; and instead of silence the attic rang with laughter and childish voices, as one by one the inhabitants of the chest were turned out upon the old oak boards, and found themselves once more noticed and brought to light.

The feelings of all prisoners when first liberated are hard to express. However much they may have longed to be free, when the freedom comes it is bewildering, and the most sedate and composed are flustered and hurried. The nerves of the old brocade were sadly shaken, and as she was dragged down flight after flight of stairs, she remembered how careful the mistress who had last worn her was not to let the dust touch her, and here she was trailing half a yard behind the feet of the little—very little—person who wore her, and whom they called the Queen.

At last all the excitement was over, and certainly the old brocade felt some pleasure in hearing herself admired. She was replaced in the chest with more careful and tender hands than she had been taken from it, and her friend the cane lay by her side as if he had never left it, and the pearls stopped their chattering, and all was quiet.

"Well," said the old brocade, "I feel I am somebody after all. Dear me! I am rather glad I have begun life again, for I heard them say that there were to be grand doings at Christmas, and we should be in use again. Yes, it is pleasant to be of use once more."

"Well," said the cane, in his usual creaky tones, "I don't like rough usage; I am so afraid of being broken in the back. You are of much tougher material, dear brocade."

"Tougher, indeed!" exclaimed the brocade, highly offended. "My texture and fabric is composed of the most delicate threads of silver and gold and satin tissue. Don't you know my story?"

"How should I," said the cane, "as you never told me? When we first came here you cried a great deal about your changed circumstances; but I am sure you never confided in me. Let me hear your story now; it may help me to forget the pain in my head, where I have certainly a deep dent from the blow I received when I first fell out of the chest."

"Yes, do tell us your story, dear Lady Brocade," said the pearls in a muffled tone from their box.

"And allow me to listen," said a gruff voice from the bottom. It came from an old sable tippet which had not been noticed in the general uprooting. "I am worth a deal more than the spangled trumpery above me."

"If that is meant for me, I appeal to my friend the cane if it can be put up with," said the brocade angrily.

The tippet was understood to apologise in a muffled tone, and the brocade began—

"I remember being stretched on a loom in the sunshine, and I remember a thin dark-eyed man calling a woman to look at me. They did not speak the language I heard afterwards, and that which those people spoke who pulled me out of my prison to-day. It was quite different; but two words I remember,

'Cara mia,' for the man always called the woman by that name. The window was open in the room when I first saw the sun light shining on me, and there were a great many long boats with coloured awnings on them, and a great many narrow streets of water crossing and recrossing each other. Venetian brocade,' I heard myself called when chosen out of many others to make part of the outfit for Lady Jemima Hibernia's wedding clothes. is a brocade fit for a queen,' I heard them say, 'six yards in length, and six guineas a yard. The design of grapes and vine leaves and the beautiful doves wrought in silver and white satin, must strike every one.' The doves used to come and perch on the window-sill while my master worked, and they were so tame. The woman he called 'Cara mia' drew the doves on a canvas, and so they were copied in the loom. I was sent to England from Venice, and, as I told you, bought for the wedding petticoat of Lady Jemima. Her mother chose me, saying to her daughter-

"'It suits you well, Jemima, to have these beautiful white doves, for I have heard Sir Gordon call you his dove.'

"Then Lady Jemima laughed and skipped about like a child, and said—

"'That beautiful brocade! I only wish it was not quite so stiff.'

"Then the man who was showing me off said, and truly, that this stiffness was one of my great beauties, for I could stand alone. At last I was made up, and the day came when my mistress were me first.

"A long white train of taffeta edged with pearls"——

"With us, if you please," called out the pearls from their box.

"Don't interrupt," said the cane.

"Edged with pearls," continued the brocade, "floated behind the little childish figure of Lady Jemima. Her beautiful tresses were built up in a tower on her small head and powdered. This set off the delicate rose-colour of her cheeks and ruby lips. She was very beautiful, and sweet and good. I heard cross words from other people, but not from her. Sir Gordon used to call her his white-winged dove, and it was a fitting name."

The old gold brocade paused and sighed, when a voice from the depths was heard—the gruff voice of the sable tippet, "I knew Lady Jemima too. I have caressed her throat many a time, and all you say is true."

"Who doubted it? Who dared to doubt it?" said the cane. "Do be quiet!"

"Well, the wedding was over, and a week afterwards my Lady went to the Queen's state ball—

Queen Charlotte was her name. I attracted notice even there, and an old lady asked, tapping my mistress with her long fan—

- "'Where did you get that lovely Venetian brocade? for it came from Venice, as sure as my name is Lady Barbara.'
- "'Yes, it came from Venice,' said my mistress in her sweet bird-like voice. 'It's very pretty, but I like my grogram and cambrics better, for I can scarce get through a minuet with this brocade.'
- "'Ah!' said the old lady with another tap of her fan, 'your dancing days are over, my Lady; you must give up frisking about now.'
- "One of the royal princes now came and asked the honour of a cotillon, and away we went. His royal eyes looked at my Lady from top to toe, and he said, 'The doves on your gown, my Lady Jemima, are very fitting to the wearer. Take care half the ladies here don't die of jealousy.'
- "It was a bleak, bitter night when the ball was over. Sir Gordon's servants were slow in getting the chairs, and the cruel blast struck us like a knife in the palace portico. My Lady shuddered, and I heard Sir Gordon muttering about carelessness; and when the servants did come with the chair he poured out a torrent of angry words.
- "'Oh, don't scold them,' my Lady said; 'there is such a crowd.'

- "'Scold them! I'd like to horsewhip them,' he said. 'You'll catch your death of cold.'"
- "'Not quite, I hope,' she said laughing as we were shut into the warm chair, and the men took up the poles and the attendants the torches and we went swinging off. But I felt my Lady shudder again and again, and the words spoken in jest were to come true.

"I was worn once more at a banquet, and then I was laid aside. My Lady was taken to the Bath for the winter, she coughed so terribly. Sir Gordon never left her. Sometimes friends came to see her, and she would divert herself by showing her beautiful dresses and her jewels, which she could not wear now. I came in always for the greatest admiration. Sir Gordon used to say I was the dress he liked best, the doves were so appropriate to the wearer. I remember the last time the waiting-woman displayed me, my Lady was lying on a couch in a soft Indian wrapper, and suddenly, as the visitor was admiring me, my texture, my design, and my dazzling beauty, she clasped her hands, saying—

"'Take it away—put it away. I shall never, never wear the brocade gown again.'

"I lay in a drawer of a bureau in my Lady's room, and could hear a great deal that passed. Sometimes the drawer was left partly open, and from one corner I could get a peep into the room.

An old gentleman with white hair and dark keen eyes often visited my Lady now. He talked a great deal to her of a beautiful palace in the King's house, and a garment more lovely than any earthly one; and he used to speak out in a loud but musical voice to some one whom I could not see. The old gentleman was called Mr. Whitfield, and my Lady would whisper low in answer to what he said.

"One Sunday evening the waiting-woman had opened the drawer where I lay to get out a larger fan, for they fanned my Lady now continually. Sir Gordon, I could see, took the fan, and sending the waiting-woman away, I could see him sitting at the head of the couch fanning my Lady.

- "'Your dove is going to fly away,' I heard her say. 'You won't grieve very much?'
 - "But I heard only a deep, deep sob in reply.
- "'I shall have a better garment where I am going,' she said, 'than the Venetian brocade with the doves. I'd like you to keep that gown for my sake; don't let anybody wear it, please.'
- "'Never!' he said, and then there was a long silence, and then I heard my Lady name a name I had often heard from the old gentleman's lips, and say quite in a loud voice—
- "'I see Him—He is coming for me,' and then I heard Sir Gordon call, and the servants came from

the next room, and some one shut my drawer, and I saw no more.

"In a short time there was much bustling and confusion, and then a long time of silence.

"One day I was taken out of my drawer and laid upon the bed with a good many other things. We were laid out as if for showing off, as we had been often before, costly lace and cases of jewels and all the pretty things which had belonged to my dear Lady. Presently Sir Gordon came into the room; he ordered the servants to leave it, and then he stood as if he were made of stone looking down on me. At last he went to a writing-table, and wrote something on a slip of paper which he pinned himself in the band which fastened me round my lady's little 'My dove, my dove!' he cried, 'oh! come waist. back,' and then he cried and blurred my silver doves with tears, and I thought he would break his heart.

"I was put carefully away with sprigs of lavender and wrapt in white cambric, and, with many other things, saw the light no more for a long time. I was brought to this house, I believe, but I was not put into that dark prison in the attic at first. I was kept in the bureau in my Lady's room, a room prepared for her, but to which she never came.

"The last thing I remember before the day when I heard the lock turn on this prison-house was Sir Gordon's voice, saying was going to India, ar wardrobe was to be to "I don't think he heard his voice agai a few other trifling which I have told "But my val think, and I ca in days gone by There was tippet mutter nobody woul old brocade them. W very low the old ' about se But folded to ap

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

"Who came home with you, Ada?" was Mr. Goodwin's question. "I was just starting."

"That nice boy Rex Stuart. He is a boy after my heart, coming so cheerfully with a blind woman through the rain, and taking such good care of me that I did not want you."

Her father laughed. "Well, I should have come before, but I have had an amusing visit from our friend Amos. Get your cloak off and come into the study. Your mother is busy with some of her 'mothers' meeting' people, so she does not want you."

Ada had her own especial corner in her father's study, and found her way to it without difficulty.

Mr. Goodwin laughed his own peculiar low laugh as he said—

"This is a new order of things, Ada. Amos came to ask me to marry him and Sue, before he had asked her if she was a consenting party to it.

He says he has no manner of doubt about it, and that he is having the 'Sarah Anne' cleaned up and beautified, and a corner made ready for Tim, and it will be all handy. I told him he ought to catch his bird before he made the cage ready, but he persisted he had caught her, all but asking."

"Oh, how amusing! But Tim must not go back to the 'Sarah Anne.' I have other views for Tim, and so has Lady Stuart."

"I expect you won't find it easy to turn Amos from his purpose," said her father. "Well, unless I hear to the contrary, I am to 'call the banns' next Sunday."

"I have had such a nice afternoon," Ada said,
"in the schoolroom with those pupils of yours, who
have had colds and toothache, but were all very nice
in spite of it."

"Rex was sneezing throughout the lessons to-day. A nice way to improve his cold, coming out in the rain with you!"

"He was buttoned up in his mackintosh, for he ran back to get it when Lady Stuart called him; and it is but a step. They are such original, out-of-the-common people," Miss Goodwin said. "As to Lady Stuart, she seems to devote herself to the children. She had written such a clever little story of an old brocade gown that the children had found in a chest in a garret. It had been worn by an an-

cestor of the Stuarts at a ball given by old Queen Charlotte."

But Mr. Goodwin's attention flagged here, and he turned back the conversation from the old brocade to the children.

- "What do you think of Agnes Stuart?" he asked abruptly.
 - "She had face-ache this afternoon."
- "She has not always got face-ache," was the rejoinder.
- "I love Regina Randall," was the rather evasive reply, "and she is always so kind and attentive to me. Don't you remember how she gathered the strawberries for me in the summer?"
 - "She gives me a great deal of uneasiness."
- "Father," exclaimed Miss Goodwin, "what do you mean?"
- "Agnes Stuart gives me uneasiness," Mr. Goodwin said, "but I don't care to tell tales out of school. I am going to read. Can you stay a little while?"
- "Oh, yes," was the delighted answer; for Ada Goodwin's education had been principally given to her by ear by her father—that is to say, he had accustomed her for years to hear all he was reading in any language, and by degrees she understood it.

In those days of which I am writing there were raised books for the blind, which the finger felt—the sense of touch being always quickened when God takes away sight—but they were not nearly so numerous as they are now, and the beautiful little machine which prints words as the fingers press down the letters one by one was unknown. I have letters written, or rather printed, by a dear friend, who has only this means of communicating with the outer world—that is, of conveying her thoughts to them. How well she does this you may imagine when I tell you that many books are printed by her clever hands, instead of written, as I am writing this story. And great indeed would the loss of many be if she had not thus given to others the benefit of the rich store of her cultured mind.

Amos Barnes was as good as his word, and that very night, when the barges lay alongside of each other at the quay, Amos stepped across the intervening strip of murky water and startled Sue by his abrupt appearance.

- "How's the little chap, then, Amos?" Sue asked.
 "I hope he isn't took worse."
 - "No," said Amos shortly.
- 'Grandmother is asleep; she ain't very well," said Sue. "Don't 'ee wake her."
 - " No," said Amos again.
- "Grandfather is a going to have one of brother Sam's youngsters to help him with the 'Fairy,' and I am a going to live with my aunt down Aylsham way."

- "No, you aren't," said Amos.
- "No! Why, you are full of your noes to-night, Amos."

"You are coming to live in the 'Sarah-Anne.' I have took on the custom. There's a lot of Luke Jones's custom will fall in to me, and you'll just come and help me; and we'll keep our church on Sundays, and we'll try to show the folks that bargees can behave like decent Christians; and then, Sue—'tis no good your saying no, for I have asked the parson to put up the banns next Sunday. Come, now, you are as fond of the little chap as I am, and you'll just make a home for him. I know you won't say no."

And Sue did not say no!

This weighty matter settled, Amos had no rest till he had told Tim. He put in by Barrow for half an hour most days and went up to Mrs. Gaze's cottage with his huge strides. Tim, who now could sit in a chair by the window, would watch for his friend's coming, and listen eagerly for the familiar sound of Amos kicking off his heavy boots in the porch; for Amos never thought now of entering Mrs. Gaze's cottage and leaving dirty footmarks behind him!

Tim was but a weak little creature still. He could hardly stand without support, for the cruel rheumatism had taken such a firm hold of those little thin legs. But Tim was learning to read and write and sing. Miss Goodwin taught him to sing, and

it was good to hear that little quavering voice lifted in praise to God. Poor dear little Tim! how hard he found it at first to give up the bad words which had been so familiar to him; how hard he found it to realise that the blessed name he had so often taken in vain in ignorance was the name of One who loved him with infinite love.

"Well, my little chap," said Amos, entering head foremost, for he could not pass under the door of the bedroom without doubling himself together, "how be you to-day?"

"I'm getting on all right," said Tim.

"That's fine! So am I," said Amos, bursting with his news. "I've got a home for you, little chap, and one who'll be like a mother to you."

Tim looked inquiringly into his friend's face, which was shining with a strange light.

"I've got a home for you, the old home—the 'Sarah Anne'—and we'll have it a tidy little place. I'm going to put her in dock—have her turned on her beam ends, and a lot of tar and paint, and a paper of rosebuds in the cabin, and lots of crockery, and Sue is going to be missis. There!" said Amos, thumping his knee with his one vigorous hand. "There!"

Tim did not look as pleased as he expected.

"You'll like it, Tim, my boy? Say you'll like it."

"I'd like you to be happy and comfortable," said Tim, "but"—— and then his breast heaved, and big tears came rolling down his little wan cheeks—"but—but I'm sorry poor father won't be there."

"Bless the child! What, when he cuffed you and swore at you, and pitched you into the river, and drank rum till the place stank of it? No, no, Tim; you can't say as how you won't like Sue a deal better to live with you. How she'll look after you, and take you along of us to the lady's meeting, and sing and all that! Tim, my boy, I thought as how you would have been pleased."

"Yes, I am pleased," sobbed poor little Tim, "only"——

Then Amos lifted Tim, as of old, to his kindly, honest breast and comforted him, and by degrees Tim grew calmer, and said, looking up with a smile—

"Have you got the little suit, Amos, with the bright buttons?"

"Aye, haven't I? And I always said you'd live to wear it, and we'd walk to church together. And so we will, Tim; only somebody else will walk with us who'll be a mother to you."

Building his happy castles in the air—or rather on the water—Amos left the cottage full of hope. He met Mrs. Gaze in the garden. Mrs. Gaze and Amos had long ago become friends, but Mrs. Gaze did not share Amos's hopeful view of Tim.

"The little chap is getting on now, thanks to

you, ma'am," Amos said, lifting his cap in token of respect.

"Well, he ain't getting on to my mind; he is just sitting still," was Mrs. Gaze's answer.

"I've been to tell him I'm going to be married, and that I've took on the 'Sarah Anne,' and I'm going to make it a home for him now."

"Bless you now, my good man," exclaimed Mrs. Gaze, "that child will never be fit for barge and boat life again. He is that rheumatic that Dr. Moore is going to send him up country somewhere. He says it is too damp for him by the river; what would it be on it? No, no; you'll never have Tim aboard the 'Sarah Anne' again—don't think it. But I am right glad you are going to marry a respectable young woman—her with the black eyes, I suppose, isn't it? I saw how the wind blew. Well, well, if you can set up a decent family barge-life for others to take example from, it will be a good thing; but you must never look to have Tim living along with you—never!"

Poor Amos! Mrs. Gaze had taken all the first sweetness out of his plan. He turned away with less elation in his step and bearing, and the light had gone out of his honest face.

He loved Sue, but to make a home for his "little chap" was one of the chief attractions which his marriage with her would bring about. And now

to have doubt cast on this his cherished scheme! What business was it of Mrs. Gaze's to interfere? He would have Tim at all risks, that he would.

Then Amos heard an inward voice which seemed to whisper, "Not if it is to hurt him—make him a cripple with rheumatism. Not if the Doctor said the river life would make him worse. No, no; better to live without him than hurt him."

And Amos's great unselfish love soon asserted itself, and he would give up the delight of having Tim for Tim's sake!

CHAPTER XXX.

"BREAKING UP."

THE examinations were over in the schoolroom at Barrow Court, and this was the last morning of lessons before the Christmas holidays.

Mr. Goodwin did all his work after the fashion of public schools, and though so common now for girls and boys—even little girls and boys—to have "papers" set with answers to be given to questions as a test of what has been really learned, it was not common—indeed very rare—thirty years ago.

Learning by heart, parrot-like, had been Agnes's and Bertha's mode of instruction, and Regina's dull routine with poor Miss Baker had been like it.

Now this exercise of the mind was a new experience to these children, and what they had learned, and how they had learned it, was put to the proof.

When Mr. Goodwin came into the schoolroom with the bundle of papers in his hand, which he had taken home to correct, all the bright young eyes were turned upon him. So many good marks

were given to each paper, and though the "average" was not high, Rex stood at the head of the list.

"Reginald Stuart," Mr. Goodwin read out the names; "Bertha Stuart, Regina Randall, Hamish Stuart."

There was a pause and expectation.

Lady Stuart, who had been invited into the school-room, looked across at Agnes. Mr. Goodwin, however, said nothing, but began again with a few remarks on the papers.

"Reginald Stuart has worked admirably for three months. His Latin prose is excellently good, and as he was very backward when we began work together, it shows that he must have taken great pains. Indeed," said Mr. Goodwin, clearing his throat and a sudden dimness rising on his spectacles,—"Indeed, I only knew one other boy who made the utmost conscientiously of the gifts God had given him, as Reginald does. May he go on as he has begun, and live to be a joy to his father and mother."

Rex was more surprised than any one else at this report, and, blushing up to the roots of his curly hair, said, "I'll try to do my best, sir, and get on."

"Bertha Stuart has also done very well. Her papers show painstaking and industry, and if the writing had been tidier the marks would have been higher. Regina Randall has conspicuously excelled in two papers—History and Composition—and

conspicuously failed in Arithmetic and Latin. But we shall see better days next term."

Regina's large eyes dilated, and she said, "I am so sorry I did no better."

"Hamish Stuart has done very well. He knows how much he has to learn, and is bravely setting himself to learn it, winning everybody's respect."

Again there was a pause, and then Mr. Goodwin said—

"Agnes Stuart is not placed. I return her papers, and she will there read my remarks, which it is better I should not read aloud."

Mr. Goodwin's voice was cold and hard, and Agnes, to whom praise was so dear, burst into tears and left the schoolroom, taking her papers with her. There were some murmurs of "injustice" and "spite," but no one noticed them.

Mr. Goodwin said no more, but proceeded to wish every one happy holidays, and to ask if the tableaux were coming off, and a variety of other questions about the children's amusements. "Work well and play well" was a favourite maxim of his, and it is a good one for us all.

Lady Stuart followed Mr. Goodwin from the schoolroom, and then there was a great clearance of books and papers, and a large cupboard with many shelves was filled with signs of school, and the room only with signs of play.

In another cupboard was the storeplace of a variety of gold and silver paper and coloured beads for the manufacture of crowns and helmets for the tableaux.

Bunchie and Berry came toddling in with a sense of security, and Bunchie, seating herself on her favourite square stool, said in her most deliberate tones, "I am to be Little Bo-Peep, and sit very still, so!" Then Bunchie pursed up her mouth, and folded her arms, and swayed her very fat little person from side to side.

"You stupid child," said Bertha, "that is not the way to do a tableaux. You must not breathe or move."

"I hold my breath, I do, when I have the hiccough," said Bunchie, "while Nurse counts twenty. So count, Bertha."

But Rex caught her up and set her on the table, and made her hold one of Hamish's crutches, and said—

- "That is the way to do Bo-Peep."
- "And Berry is to be Little Boy Blue, and there's to be a real Father Christmas."

"Regina," said Bertha, "what did you do with the tow for Father Christmas's wig? Why, Regina isn't here."

Hamish guessed where Regina had gone, and he guessed right. Agnes's distress had quite spoiled

Regina's "breaking up." She went softly to the room and tapped at the door. To her surprise, Agnes opened it, and said almost defiantly—

"Well, what do you want, Regina?"

"I am so sorry to see you unhappy," said Regina, "I could not help coming to tell you so," and Regina put her arms timidly round Agnes's neck.

"Oh, I am not going to break my heart because I am bottom of the examination. I don't care enough for Mr. Goodwin to mind what he says. I don't care!"

In spite of these protestations, there was a suspicious trembling in Agnes's voice. "I have tossed the old papers into the fire, and there is an end of it! Now I am going to get ready to drive to the station to meet the Smiths after dinner. I am sorry only Tottie and May are coming. I wanted Frank, who was a very particular friend of mine, but it is so nice to have Tottie. I can't think what you look so grave about."

"Oh, I thought you were unhappy," said Regina, "that was all. I must go and get ready for dinner."

Regina was just leaving the room when she met Lady Stuart, looking very grave and sad.

"You can go and get ready for dinner, dear," she said, addressing Regina; "I have come to speak to Agnes."

Regina saw something was grieving Lady Stuart, and she went away at once.

- "I am come, Agnes," Lady Stuart said, "to see your examination papers."
- "You can't see them, mamma; they were so bad, I burned them. You must not be angry with me, dearest mamma. I never did a paper before. Mrs. Smith"——

"Agnes," Lady Stuart said in a slow grave voice, "it is not the question of whether the papers were ill or well done. It is that Mr. Goodwin was obliged not to place you at all, for you have taken the historical answers verbatim from Mrs. Markham's History, and the Latin from the 'Key' to Smith's 'Principia,' and the arithmetic had simply right answers given with no attempt to work the proposi-Mr. Goodwin says that he was most unwilling to tell me this, and to tell me also that he has again and again detected you in absolute cheating. He says it would be cruel to you to let such a confirmed habit pass without notice, though he is very, very sorry to disturb this happy season with such sad complaints. When I think of your noble honourable father, Agnes, and of his hatred of anything like shuffling or deceit, I feel so miserable. I must mark my sense of it by a punishment, and I have decided that you should stay in your room till Sunday morning, and that no

one should come to you except Nurse, who will bring you your meals."

"Oh, but, mamma, pray, pray, don't punish me like that! The Smiths are coming. I must go and meet them at the station. Oh, don't be so cruel! What will they think? I will never copy anything again. It was only a very little bit of Mrs. Markham."

"Hush! Agnes. Do not attempt to excuse yourself. I have a duty to perform, and hard as it is, I must not shrink from it. You have had many warnings since you have been with me. Again and again you have been untruthful, and if you do not see the great sin in God's sight, and set yourself with prayer and watchfulness to overcome it, I tremble for the future. This punishment will help, I trust, to show you how very serious a fault you have committed. This is Thursday, and by Saturday evening I hope to find you really penitent, and then you will join us at breakfast on Sunday morning. The past shall not be referred to, and you will, I hope, begin afresh, with a resolute purpose to amend."

"But I am sorry. Oh, it is the Smiths, the Smiths, I mind. What will they think? What will they say? Oh, mamma, do let me go to the station—do forgive me this once. I will live on bread and water when the Smiths are gone. I will"——

"Dear Agnes, I cannot change now. I have asked

to be directed rightly, and, grieved as I am, I must not alter my determination."

And then Lady Stuart left the room with a heavy heart. To her tender, loving nature it was positive pain to seem harsh and unkind; but the path seemed plain before her, and she would not turn aside from it. Agnes surely would never forget this lesson, and Lady Stuart hoped that some real sorrow for her fault would awake in the poor child's heart.

The dinner was very silent; every one knew that Agnes was in disgrace, though not one of the children asked a question about it.

- "The carriage will be round at three o'clock, Bertha," Lady Stuart said; "you must come with me to meet your friends at the station. Rex and Regina also, if they like."
 - "Is Agnes to come, mother?" asked Bertha.
- "No, my dear; Agnes is to stay in her room till Sunday."
- "Till Sunday! But, mamma, what will the Smiths say?" exclaimed Bertha.
- "My dear Bertha, what the Smiths say is by far the least important part of this sad subject. I do not wish to say any more about it now. We must be punctual in starting, so be quite ready when the carriage comes round."
- "I don't care to come and meet the Smiths, unless you wish for me, mother," Rex said.

"And, please, may I stay with Hamish?" Regina asked.

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish," Lady Stuart said. Regina kept very near Lady Stuart as they went upstairs, Berry on Rex's back, Bunchie toddling up one step at a time behind him.

"May I go and see Agnes?" Regina whispered.
"Please let me."

Lady Stuart hesitated; but looking down at the little earnest face turned up to hers, she was surprised to see Regina's dark lustrous eyes dim with tears.

"I am so sorry for Agnes," she said. "Can you forgive her?"

"Forgiveness is ready, Regina, for her, but I must not treat her fault lightly. I must adhere to what I have said."

"I should like to go and see her," Regina urged.

"Not till to-morrow. I shall go and see her this evening, and if she is really repentant, I will allow you to go to her for an hour to-morrow."

Lady Stuart stooped and kissed Regina tenderly, and she turned slowly and sadly to the schoolroom.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHANGES.

"I THOUGHT you were never coming up from dinner," said Hamish. "When are these wonderful Smiths going to arrive? I do hope you won't let them come near me."

"They'll have to be in the schoolroom a good deal," said Regina.

"Then I shall have to go to my old corner in the nursery again, that's all. Dear me! it is a pity they should come to spoil our Christmas holidays."

"There's something else to spoil them," said Regina. "Poor Agnes is in disgrace, and is not allowed to come out of her room till Sunday."

"Well, I daresay she deserves it," said Hamish shortly. "Now, shall we cut out some more of those gilt paper stars and stick them on the dresses?"

Regina got out the paste and scissors, and put the gold and silver paper on Hamish's desk, which was fitted to the table of his couch. He snipped away vigorously, and his artistic fingers shaped the stars

and crescents very quickly. Sounds of merriment were heard from the nursery, where Rex was kindly amusing the little ones, and the solitary prisoner in her own room felt very miserable.

Here she was, defeated at all points; for the ambition to stand well with Mr. Goodwin had prompted the deceit about her lessons, and the desire to be admired and loved had tempted her into many little insincerities.

I do not know if any children who read my story have a like temptation; perhaps some may have had it, and been taught to struggle against it in the right way; perhaps some have never looked at it, as it ought to be looked at, as a very serious and grave matter. The least departure from truth at the beginning should be fought against as the enemy of all peace. Who shall tell the misery which has been brought forth by one falsehood, by one deceitful action? Never, I think I may safely say, does one such falsehood or action remain single. Thus almost invariably many lies are found necessary to support the first; the little spark kindles a great fire, and hard indeed it is to put it out.

Agnes was very sorry to be punished, and the afternoon passed drearily enough. She heard the voices in the passages and the carriage come round. She heard it roll away to the station, and then all was quiet. Agnes got out her desk and tried to

write, but somehow she could not get on either with her journal or "Lady Belinda." Her eyes ached with crying and her heart swelled with resentment. Suddenly an idea seized her. "I shall write to papa and tell him how shamefully I am treated, how mamma makes favourites, and how every one is set up against me." In this self-deception Agnes began her letter to her father, and, warming with her subject, became regardless of sense or spelling, and cried over her imaginary woes as she related them, till the paper was blistered with her tears.

"The wonderful Smiths," as Hamish called them, proved to be anything but wonderful. Tottie was a quiet, plain little girl of thirteen, who spoke in a low voice, and seemed unable to show either joy or sorrow. Even Agnes's non-appearance did not seem to move her greatly, and she scarcely made any remark when told she could not see her "dearest friend" till Sunday. Mary was a year younger and rather rough and boisterous; "a tomboy," who tried to make friends with Rex at once, and did not enter at all heartily into the preparations for the tableaux.

There were other preparations going on at Barrow besides the tableaux. Lady Stuart was getting ready a very particular entertainment for her river people. The room had become quite an object of interest to all the children, and it was to be decorated for the tea.

Little Tim was still living with Mrs. Gaze, but he paid visits to Mr. and Mrs. Amos Barnes, who were "at home" in the "Sarah Anne," and Tim had during his illness shown a decided and remarkable taste for cutting out wood with a knife. Figures, boats, and animals were all represented, and Amos was lost in admiration at his "little chap's" performances. A shelf in the "Sarah Anne" was devoted to the figures, which, however quaint and rough, were remarkable as the performance of a little untaught barge-boy.

Amos was looking forward to his Christmas treat, when Tim was to occupy a little nook for two or three days, and wear the blue suit with bright buttons, and go to church with him and Mrs. Amos.

The blue suit had long ago been carefully brushed and laid away, with a new shirt and wide collar, and a little blue cap. Hope and fear had alternated in Amos's honest breast as to whether his "little chap" would ever wear that suit; but now the hope was greater than the fear, and Amos looked forward to that day as the proudest of his life.

Amos had boarded off a little corner of the cabin for Tim, and he had hung there a tiny glass and two little pictures which had taken his fancy, and there was a little jug and basin on a shelf; for the "little chap" had been kept so clean and "spick and span" at the cottage, he must not feel dirty any more.

The bed prepared for Tim was but a sort of hammock, but Sue, who knew "what was what," as her husband expressed it, had provided the bed with sheets, and a patchwork coverlet, with which her grandmother had presented her on her marriage, made this corner of the "Sarah Anne" look quite gay. Indeed, the whole aspect of the barge was different to the old times. The little square windows had been made to open on hinges, the rubbish had been cleared away; and above all, there was no pervading smell of spirits and tobacco. The former was banished entirely, and Amos only smoked a pipe on the deck of an evening while Sue was "righting up" down below.

There was a great deal of scoffing and laughing on board the other barges at first. Every one who begins to reform bad habits must not expect things to go smoothly, but by degrees example has an effect, and there is no doubt that Amos was doing his work silently amongst his rough mates, who wished sometimes their places were a bit tidier, and had to confess that Sue's neat gown and close-plaited hair were more agreeable to look at than rags and untidiness, dishevelled hair and tawdry finery.

The time of Agnes's imprisonment was nearly over, and Lady Stuart went to her on Saturday

evening to have a real talk with her. Agnes cried a great deal, kissed and embraced her mother, promised that she would never, never offend in the same way again, and Lady Stuart was obliged to be satisfied.

But she did not think Agnes was truly penitent, and she would rather have seen her show more signs of shame when she joined the schoolroom party on Sunday morning. In a new dress of blue merino, Agnes looked very pretty, and if she felt any confusion, she covered it with rapturous kissing of the two Smiths and Regina.

By the time Sunday was over, Agnes was completely herself again, and the very memory of her fault and its punishment seemed to have passed away.

Tottie and Agnes walked to church arm locked in arm, but Agnes seemed to have the talk all on her side. The Cheltenham experiences had apparently less charm for her friend than for her.

On Monday morning Agnes said she would show Tottie over the house, and talked grandly of the size of the rooms and their number, expecting Tottie to be much impressed. But Tottie was not given to admiration, and took it all very quietly.

The attic was visited, and the large chest shown where the treasures were hidden which were to be produced for the tableaux on New Year's Eve. "A splendid old brocade worn by my grandmother, Lady

Jemima Stewart, at the Queen's ball. She lived a great deal at the court of Anne! Now I will show you Regina Randall's rooms-she has two. know she is an enormous heiress. She and I have been great friends, but I think she cares more for Hamish and Rex than for me. It's odd that a girl like her should like boys so much; but she does. I wish Frank had come; for, though Rex is my brother, I may tell you he is a little bit conceited. and wants to know what other boys are like. Frank would take him down a little. Here we are in the west wing. These are Regina's rooms. Mrs. Clarke, her maid, works in this one. She is a funny old thing, and makes such odd remarks."

Tottie warmed up to a little interest in Regina's room.

"She is a very nice girl, isn't she? and very clever, Bertha says."

"Oh, clever in her own way. There are her books, and this is her huge desk, given to her by Mrs. Turnbull. Do you know, there are secrets in it. I believe it is not locked; you shall just have a peep."

"Oh, don't open it, Agnes. Don't touch anything —pray don't."

"I am only going to lift this upper part. There are two secret packets there, not to be opened till she is eighteen. Isn't it ridiculous?"

Tottie Smith turned resolutely away, and Agnes was obliged to shut the desk; but she was hankering after these packets, and wondering about their contents.

It was a delightful winter morning, a clear, blue sky above, and the ground hard, just peppered with a little fine snow that had fallen in the night.

Rex appeared as Agnes and Tottie Smith left the schoolroom, with a basket and a large knife.

- "I say, who will come out to the plantation with me? I am going to cut some more fir branches for the decorations, and I think I can find some red ivy leaves up by the gate."
- "Oh, I should like to come," said Agnes; and Bunchie and Berrie came running out of the nursery equipped for their morning walk.
 - "May we come, Rex?"
 - "Certainly not," said Agnes.
- "Oh, do let them come," said Regina. "It is different to a regular walk; do let them come. I will take care of them."
- "Sophy must go with them," said Nurse. "I could not dare trust them with you, and I am very busy this morning, and Mrs. Clarke has sprained her foot, or got the rheumatics or something."
- "We don't want Sophy," exclaimed Bertha, who now joined the rest of the party with Mary Smith.

"Well, we mustn't take the children without asking mother," Rex said. "I'll go and ask her."

He raced away, and called from the hall that they might come, but that Sophy was to come also.

Bunchie, in her little scarlet cloak and grebefeather hat, was a picture of a child dressed for a
winter morning expedition. Berry, buttoned up in
a thick, rough jacket, with his round, rosy, contented
face peeping over the white comforter round his neck,
looked as if nothing would ever disturb his serenity.
Lady Stuart left her writing-table and went to the
window to watch the procession of children pass
up the path leading to the plantation — a large,
merry party, the little ones stumping along bravely
to keep up with the rest; and so they vanished from
her sight, and she sat down to her morning's occupation, a part of which was always to write a history of
the previous day to Sir Montague Stuart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LOST.

LADY STUART had got through a good morning's work, and was crossing the hall to the foot of the staircase, when she saw Bertha running wildly past one of the hall windows.

Bertha burst open the front door and called out, "Mamma! mamma!"

"What is the matter, Bertha? Is anything wrong?"
Bertha's white face and trembling lips, which
seemed to be unable to form the words she longed
to say, were enough to show Lady Stuart that something had happened.

- "Oh, mamma, mamma! its Bunchie! We've lost Bunchie!"
- "Lost her! What do you mean?" said Lady Stuart, pressing her hand to her side as if struck by a great pain.
 - "We-we have lost her!"
 - "Where is Sophy?"
 - "It is not Sophy's fault. We wanted another

basket, and we sent her back to the house for one, and "-----

"Where is Rex? I want Rex," Lady Stuart said. "Surely Rex did not leave the child."

"Rex had nothing to do with it. He had gone down the path by the white gate to look for kingcups and the red ivy. He and Regina took Berry and Mary Smith. Tottie and I were left with Agnes. Agnes insisted on sending Sophy back for another basket and a knife, and she put Bunchie on the gate and let her swing. I told her not to do so. but she never listens to me. When Sophy was gone, I went to look after Rex. I knew it was wrong, mamma, but Agnes was so disagreeable. She now pretends she thought I took Bunchie with me, but it is just like Agnes to tell what is not true. She and Tottie Smith must have left Bunchie alone; and when we came back to the gate, where we had agreed we would all meet, Agnes and Tottie Smith were not to be seen. Of course we thought Bunchie was safe with them. But when Sophy came back with the basket, and we were all going down the middle path in the wood, we met Agnes and Tottie with a quantity of ivy in their hands. 'Where is Bunchie?' we asked. And, oh! mamma, Agnes said she left her with me. It is not true; it is false. We all raced back to the gate, but Bunchie was gone. Rex and Regina have gone looking one way, and Mary Smith and Sophy another. Agnes must have left her perched on the gate, but she could not have got down by herself. It is impossible! Some one must have lifted her down."

All this was said at intervals, as Bertha followed Lady Stuart to her room, where she put on her walking things, and so quietly that no one would have guessed the pain which was at her heart. Then she went to the nursery, and called to Nurse to follow with one of the men-servants to look for Miss Blanche, who was lost; then to Hamish. He was practising his crutches alone, and turned brightly, saying—

"I am getting on splendidly. Why, mother!" The white face struck him at once. "Mother! what is it?"

Hamish put down his crutches, and resting on his couch stretched out his arms to Lady Stuart.

- "O Hamish! Hamish! they have lost Blanche!"
- "Lost Blanche! How and where?"
- "I cannot stay to tell you all particulars. I know nothing but the fact. Dear Hamish, we may find her, but"—— A short quick sob stopped Lady Stuart from saying more, and then she went swiftly away.

On her way towards the plantation she met poor

LOST. 303

little Berry, his rosy face stained with tears, in Sophy's arms.

"Oh, my lady, my lady! I hope you won't blame me. I"—— Sophy was crying, and Berry set up a sympathetic roar.

"I want Bunch," he said,

"Mother is going to try and find Bunchie. Don't cry, my darling." And the mother sped on her way.

Nurse and two or three servants were behind her—the footman, and Mrs. Gaze, and others. Sophy did not come off so easily from Nurse. She stopped to "give her a piece of her mind," and told her she had no business for fifty Miss Agnes's to leave the children. Regina's nurse was equally hard on Sophy when she reached the house, and, unmoved by her tears, told her she was not fit to be trusted with Berry, whom she took possession of and undressed before the fire, and told Sophy she might take herself off.

Meanwhile the search for the lost child continued. Rex and Regina had gone in one direction, and Mary Smith with them.

Agnes and Tottie, the former crying and lamenting, went in the opposite direction, skirting the hedge which divided the plantation from the heath; but they were both too nervous and frightened to make any real search.

The alarm about the lost child at the Court spread

rapidly. Mr. Goodwin came out to join in the search, but the short winter day was closing in, and nothing was seen of little Bunchie.

There were a good many contradictory statements, and when the tired searchers gathered together before the house about four o'clock, Mr. Goodwin said—

"We have as yet no distinct notion of when or by whom the child was last seen. I will go into Norminster and tell the superintendent of police to institute inquiries; but first," he said, turning to Lady Stuart, "I should like to see and question all the party who went up to the plantation this morning. It is very important to know the precise facts."

"Yes," Lady Stuart said; "but the children have had no dinner; they must be worn out and hungry." And then the thought of the little lost one, who was probably hungry and tired and cold, came over her, and she could not restrain her tears.

The children all sat down to a silent and sad dinner, turning their heads every moment to the windows with the sort of restless longing which we have all felt when watching and expecting.

Lady Stuart ate nothing, but helped them all as usual, and was again quite calm. Mr. Goodwin waited till the meal was over, and then he said—

"I wish one of you to give me and your mother a distinct and *true* account of the loss of the child. I will ask Rex to speak first,"

"We all went up to the plantation this morning, sir, to gather ivy and evergreens to stick up in the bargemen's room. By the white gate we divided. I took Berry with me, and Regina and Mary Smith. We left Bunchie with Sophy, and Agnes and Bertha, and Tottie Smith. I know nothing more, sir, than that when we joined the others in what we call the middle walk, they said Bunchie was lost. I can say no more, for I know no more. Regina and I and Mary hunted all along the edge of the plantation as soon as we heard Bunchie was lost, but we could not find her."

This direct statement, hopeless as it sounded, won Mr. Goodwin's approval. There was no attempt to shift the blame on any one; it was the plain truth.

"Then," Mr. Goodwin said, when Rex had finished, "I am to understand Miss Bertha and Agnes and Miss Smith were left in charge of the little girl."

"I did not know I was in charge," Agnes began.
"I tried to please Bunchie. I set her up on the gate and let her swing, and Bertha would send Sophy for the basket, though I told her not."

"O Agnes!" Bertha exclaimed. "You said we could not get the ivy with the black berries without another knife, and you said"——

"Answer one question, please, Miss Bertha." Mr.

Goodwin had assumed his tutor's manner, and the children all felt as if he were in the arm-chair at the head of the schoolroom table, and that they must do what they were told.

"One question, Miss Bertha. Where did you see your little sister last?"

"On the top of the white gate. There's a very broad ledge at the top, and she was lifted up there by Sophy, while Agnes and Tottie swung her backwards and forwards."

"That gate is not usually unlocked," said Lady Stuart. "Gaze must have neglected to lock it."

Mr. Goodwin went on with his examination.

"And you left her on the top of the gate?"

"Yes," said Bertha, bursting into tears; "but Agnes and Tottie Smith were with her, and they were so—at least Agnes was—so disagreeable, saying such nasty things about Regina, and"——

"That's not to the point," Mr. Goodwin said. "You left your sister on the gate. Now, Miss Agnes, what have you to say?"

Agnes turned very red and then very pale.

"We left Bunchie with Bertha just for an instant, because I knew there were some fir cones not far off, and I thought Bunchie would like them; and when we met the others, they said Bunchie was lost."

"Do you give the same account as your friend does, Miss Smith?" said Mr. Goodwin, looking

straight at Tottie Smith, with his keen, searching glance.

Tottie blushed and hung down her head, saying, in a very low tone, "Yes."

"We must organise another party for searching the district," said Mr. Goodwin, "and I will go into Norminster with Rex and give notice of our loss at the police-station. I think it is clear that a child scarcely four years old cannot have walked beyond reach of us."

Lady Stuart clasped her hands tightly together.

"You think she is stolen?"

"Perhaps, for the sake of a reward. There are a good many tramps between Barrow and the village of Colne; but we need not deal with uncertainties. You will stay quietly at home now," he said, as Lady Stuart put on her cloak and drew on her gloves. "You had better stay quietly here," Mr. Goodwin repeated, "and the girls also. It is getting quite dark."

Dark! How the word smote on the mother's ear. Yes, it was the beginning of a long, dark, winter's night, and her darling was far from her. The two little beds would stand in the nursery that night side by side, and one would be empty.

"I should like to go up to the white gate again," she said in a sad pleading voice. "I could go with Gaze and Regina or Bertha. Perhaps she fell asleep

under some tree or in the beech-wood. If she is within reach, she would know my voice. There is no pond near, no water of any kind, so that fear is taken away."

Mr. Goodwin did not like to oppose Lady Stuart's wishes, and she set out towards the plantation with Gaze, who carried a lantern, and Bertha and Regina. As they were starting, Agnes, who was far more miserable than her sister or Regina, crept out of the house and followed them, while Mr. Goodwin and Rex went off to Norminster in the carriage.

Suddenly Lady Stuart stopped. "We are forgetting Hamish," she said; "he cannot move or help us. Some one must go to h: "

Then Regina left her hold and said, "I work to Stuart's arm,



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LITTLE NOOK.

WHEN Regina went into the schoolroom, she found Hamish lying with his face buried in the cushion.

- "Well," he said, raising his head, "I suppose you all thought I didn't care about the child. Is she found?"
- "No," Regina said sadly. "Oh, I can't think where she is, little darling!"
- "It was shameful to leave her alone, a baby like her," Hamish exclaimed, hiding his emotion under cross, angry words. "It is shameful—you ought all to be ashamed of yourselves."
- "Ashamed! O Hamish! I feel as if I should never be happy again if Bunchie is"——

Regina fairly broke down now, and Puck, who had been of the party to the plantation, expressed sympathy with his mistress and every one concerned by suddenly sitting up on his hind-legs and whining.

"Tell me all about it," Hamish said; "instead of crying, Regina, tell me exactly what happened."

Regina did as he wished and told him what we already know.

"It is Agnes's fault, of course; and I daresay she will try and put the blame on somebody else."

"She is dreadfully sorry," Regina said. "She is gone back with Lady Stuart to the plantation again."

"And I have to lie here—I who ought to be of use! You don't know how hard it is."

"Yes, I think I do. But, Hamish, you are so much better, and you will soon be walking about on your crutches. Then, I am sure you are"——Regina stopped.

"Go on! I am what?"

"So much kinder than you used to be to every one."

Hamish was silent. Then he said in his old, gruff way, "I don't feel kind now. I feel savage when I think of that poor little thing left perched on a gate by those who ought to have known better."

They talked at intervals for two hours. Sophy brought in the tea, crying and sobbing as she did so, but she said nothing.

From the nursery came a sound of wailing from poor Berry.

"I want Bunchie-where is Bunchie?"

Presently Nurse opened the schoolroom door with Berry in her arms.

"The child is so miserable," she said. "I wish you'd try and amuse him."

"There," said Nurse, "look at Puck, dearie. Make him beg, Miss Regina; that always pleases the children. The children! Dear me! there is only one now to please," and Nurse hid her face amongst Berry's curls.

Puck went through his tricks at Regina's bidding, and sat up with the bit of sugar on his little black nose till she had counted twelve.

But Berry took only a languid interest, and repeated in a low monotone, "I want Bunchie!"

About seven o'clock the party from the woods returned. Lady Stuart came with a slow, feeble step into the schoolroom, and sinking back in a chair said, "It is useless; we can't find her. Oh, her father! her father! How shall I tell him?"

Rex was the next to arrive. He had no good news, but at least there was the comfort of knowing that the search for the child was set on foot, and that the police were hopeful that they should track the people who had taken the child away. For it seemed certain that Bunchie must have been stolen by some tramp or gipsy, probably for the sake of a reward or to sell her clothes. The children's bedtime came, and Lady Stuart beckoned Rex to her.

"I should like to have prayers as usual," she said.
"Will you read for me? Tell the servants to come up here."

Very soon the schoolroom was full of tearful, sad, and anxious faces, and then the young boyish voice read what his mother's hand pointed out—

"Whose dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almightv. I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my hope and my stronghold: my GoD; in Him will I trust. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter and from the noisome pestilence. He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers. His faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the sickness that wasteth in the noonday. thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the ungodly. For Thou, Lord, art my hope; Thou hast set Thine house of defence very high. There shall no evil happen unto thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee in their hands, that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt go upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet. Because He hath set His love upon me, therefore will I deliver him. I will set him up because he hath known My name. He shall call on Me, and I will hear him; yea, I am with him in trouble: I will

deliver him, and bring him to honour. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."

When Rex had ceased, Lady Stewart said-

"Will you all pray with me for my lost child?"

Her voice was very faint and weak at first, but it grew stronger as she called upon the Defender and Keeper, on Him whose face the children's angels always behold, on Him who fulfilled His promise, and was with her in this sore trouble.

I can hardly tell you how the long night passed with the anxious mother, nor the next long weary day and troubled night. Kind friends came and went. A large reward was offered for the recovery of the child. It was deeply pathetic to those who loved that dear little one to read the description of her.

"Lost in the neighbourhood of Barrow Heath, and last seen on the 10th December, seated on a white gate which leads from the grounds of Barrow Court to the Heath, a little girl about four years old; she wore a round hat with grebe trimming, a scarlet cloak with a cape fastened behind with black velvet rosettes, a dark-blue merino frock, white gaiters, and buttoned boots. The child has a quantity of light curling hair, a round rosy face with deep violet eyes, and speaks in a slow distinct voice unusual for her age. She is named Blanche, but answers to the pet name of Bunchie."

There was one anxious searcher for little Blanche

who looked for no reward. I need not tell you that this was Amos Barnes.

"After all she has been and done for the little chap and for me, it's kinder hard the good lady should suffer. Tell 'ee what, Sue, I must leave the 'Sarah Anne' to thee and Tim for a day or two, and go and spy everywhere."

"So do, Amos, so do," said Sue. "I'll get one of the boys from the 'Fairy' to punt a bit when the wind is contrary. I've not been a barge-girl all my life that I can't get on as right as ninepence. If I have Tim for company, I doesn't mind, and I'll keep an eye on the barge. Some of our folks may have got hold of the lamb."

"I don't fancy they'd do it," said Amos, "but there's no harm in keeping thy eye on 'em—a sharp eye like thine, Sue. I can't understand it, how the dear lady, who ought to be rewarded for all her goodness, should have such a trial. However, the Lord knows better than Amos Barnes. I'll just go and fetch the little chap from the cottage, and he'll be as pleased as Punch to come."

Poor Tim did not look as pleased as Punch when Amos led him to the "Sarah Anne," and waited to see his surprise and joy at the little nook prepared for him.

For truth to tell, after the neat white bedroom at the cottage, the "little nook" in the old barge did not seem so delightful in his eyes as in Amos's. But he said he would like to stay along with Sue while Amos went to look for the little lady, and he'd "take care of her," and help her to get the dinner.

"Bless him, that he will," said Sue; "and I'll keep him warm enough, and we'll sing a lot of hymns ready for the meeting, and we'll pray to the Lord to bring the little lady back." So with several very loud and emphatic kisses, Amos hooked a bag over his shoulder with a few onions and some bread and cheese and departed.

"You be allus in luck's way, Amos Barnes," said a mocking voice from a barge lying close to the "Sarah Anne." "It is a rare trade to play hypocrite; you'll be bringing back a pot of money for finding the child! Dessay you know where to go for her."

Something like one of his old oaths rose to Amos's lips, but was instantly checked. He strode off, never turning his head; and leaving his wife to silence the accuser with her sharp and ready tongue, he was soon out of sight.

Tim had plenty to amuse him in examining his little nook; and he was much pleased with the looking-glass, though it had a curious power of altering the shape of his face, making it look doubled up and crumpled in some mysterious way. Then there was the suit to try on, the buttons to be polished up, the smart blue necktie to admire.

"It was all for a Christmas surprise, you know, Tim; but though it has came a bit sooner, you don't mind, do you?" "No," said Tim. "I'd like to go back to Mrs. Gaze afterwards, please."

"Oh, very well," Sue rejoined. "You'll not be fit to get your own living for many a long day, so you had best stick to your friends. Here is a sharp little knife I thought I'd give you at Christmas, and I begged some blocks of soft wood from a carpenter, a friend of mine, down at the wharf. He said they often wanted figure-heads for the craft when they were finishing up, and I told him how clever you were, though you are such a little chap, and that you should cut out a head on purpose for him to see. I've put the wood all in that old box handy, and you can put your chips in the sack, can't you, Tim, and not litter the place over."

So, as the winter evening set in, Sue and her little friend were quite comfortable and happy, Tim chipping away at his wooden face, and Mrs. Amos singing hymns in her loud and not very musical voice. But Mrs. Amos sang with her heart, and so there was *music* there.

"The poor little lady!" she sighed as she looked out on the dark wintry night and heard the sighing of the bleak wind in the sedges. "The poor, dear little lady! I do hope Amos'll find her. He has got some plan in his head, I do believe."

Then, having smoothed Tim's pillow and kissed him, she left him to his dreams.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

LITTLE BUNCHIE was very much pleased with her position on the top of the white gate. Her back was turned to the plantation, her face to the heath. She did not even notice that Agnes and Tottie Smith had left her, and there was no fear in her heart. The blue sky was above her, there were thousands of little sparkling diamonds on every leafless twig and branch. Bunchie drew her fingers along the ledge of the gate, and looked admiringly at the glistening white morsels on her thick glove.

Sharp eyes were on Bunchie all this time, and sharp ears had been open to all that the children had said, and a tall woman with dark eyes and raven hair and big rings hanging from her ears had crept close up to Bunchie before she had heard a sound.

- "You must be stiff and tired sitting on that gate, my beauty. I'll lift you off and carry you home."
- "Thank you," said Bunchie in all good faith, stretching out her little hands towards the woman.

Quick as thought she was whipped off, laid full length in the woman's arms, covered with a large shawl, and borne swiftly down by the hedge which skirted the plantation; and as the heath sloped downwards to a hollow about a quarter of a mile from the gate, they were soon out of sight of any one standing there.

The woman, after skirting the plantation, made her way through the hollow, which was a tangle of brushwood, and when on the other side she paused, lifting the shawl to look at Bunchie, who had been too much surprised and frightened to stir. Now, however, she struggled violently and screamed as she looked round her.

"Take me home; take me home, I say. I want to go home."

"So you shall, my pretty. Lor! what eyes you've got! they are like the sky; and what hair! it's like gold. I'll take you home sure enough. We'll go on now."

The woman looked through the leafless twigs of the brushwood and thorns which grew in the hollow, and was apparently satisfied. She took Bunchie again in her strong arms, and keeping well under the highest level of the heath, ascended it again some two miles farther on, till she came to another hollow, where there was a rude van, smoke coming out of the chimney, and a cart with the shafts turned up, by which a horse and donkey, with logs attached to their forelegs, were trying to nibble some food from the hard frozen earth.

"What have you got there, Nell?" asked a man with a short pipe in his mouth. "A fat goose, eh?"

"A gosling," said the woman with a laugh, setting Bunchie down on her feet. "There!"

"My! she is a beauty though! She'll bring in something."

Poor little Bunchie stood still for a few moments, too much bewildered to speak or move. Then she said in her grave slow earnest way, "Please, I want to go home, I do very much."

"Well, we'll see about it to-morrow," said the woman; "now you must do as you are bid, or, you know, I've a whip for little girls."

"You are a naughty woman," cried Bunchie; "you've told a wicked story."

A loud laugh was the only answer to this, and then the man and woman talked for some time in a tongue which sounded gibberish to Bunchie. The result of the conversation was, that the horse was put to the van, the donkey to the cart. Bunchie was lifted into the former, where an old woman and a boy were crouching over some dull embers, and in half an hour the van and the cart and the people were all moving on, jolting and creaking along the

hard pathway, for it was scarcely a road across the heath, till they reached a similar hollow to the one they had left on the other side of the village of Colne. At first dear little Bunchie quite believed she was being taken to her home; but when the van came to a stop, the woman began to undress her, telling her she should go home in the morning; that she must go to bed now, and go to sleep.

Bunchie now set up a loud roar and stamped her feet, and said imperiously, "Take me home to my mother, I say!"

Poor little girl! she was only boxed on the ear and told to hold her noise or she should not go home at all. All her pretty things were taken off, and a little short gown, tied with a tape at the neck, put on. Her hair was cut off by a pair of sheep-shears, and then she was covered with an old rug and laid on a sort of shelf in the corner of the stuffy, smoky, untidy van and told to go to sleep.

Bunchie cried and sobbed, and the man and woman went outside and consulted together.

"A reward is sure to be offered," the woman said.

"She belongs to the big house at Barrow—to real gentry."

"Reward! Aye! but how will ye get it? Most like your reward will be a year in gaol for stealing of her."

"I ain't such an idiot as to let 'em know where

she came from. Trust to me. I've got a plan. Her clothes are worth a pretty sight. I can sell 'em in London for three pounds. They'll pay for her keep, and I'll get the reward too, just as I did for the young heifer. And who was the wiser? It's a good thing to have a deaf mute for some things if not for all."

She now signed to the boy, who had been crouching by the fire, and he got up and began to make preparations for supper, the old crone going on her knees and puffing and blowing at the fire. As she did so she was conscious of a voice from the corner, where poor Bunchie, having cried till she could cry no more, was saying her little prayer—

"'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me; Bless Thy little lamb to-night,'

'and Berry too,'" with a great sob.

"'Through the darkness be Thou near me, Watch my sleep till morning light.'

O God, please bless me and make me a good girl. Mother! O mother!"

The old woman rose from her knees before the fire, and taking some milk in a cup to the child said—

"Take it, my pretty lamb! Drink it and go to sleep. Old Nan will take care of you."

Bunchie swallowed the milk, and then, worn out

with all she had gone through, fell into a sound sleep.

Brave in heart and strong of limb, Amos strode along over the heath to the village of Colne. He knew the part well, as he had been there several times since Luke Jones's death to visit the poor old grandfather of his "little chap." Amos remembered to have seen in a certain hollow on the heath a tramp's van and cart—gipsies or tramps—the man with kettles strung together to mend, the woman of the true gipsy type. Amos made for this hollow place, but it was empty. He saw traces, however, of a recent fire left by blackened ashes on the ground, and he said to himself, "Made off!" He pursued his way to the village, anxious to avoid being noticed as on the look-out. He went first to old Jones's cottage.

The old man began to cry when he saw him in a childish way, and said he supposed "the little chap was dead now."

"Nothing of the kind, grandfather; he is as brisk as a bee. I came to hear how you were getting on. My missis is going to make you a Christmas-puddin, and I shall be coming with that next week."

"I don't want no Christmas-puddin," was the encouraging rejoinder. "Christmas-puddin won't give back the dead!"

"Well, no," said Amos; "but it'll cheer you up a bit to know we think of you."

Presently a neighbour came by. "There's been a child lost on Barrow Heath," she said. "There's a notice of a handsome reward posted up at the police station in Norminster, and in other places too. Here's one of the bills." And the woman, who had been into Norminster market, took from her basket a bill printed in large letters.'

"I shouldn't wonder if the gipsies had got the child," said another woman, who was looking over the wall of old Jones's cottage garden. "Them are a sly lot. Don't you mind how that fine young heifer was led back by a deaf mute to Farmer Selby's, and how he had the reward? Folks said he only passed it on to his master, a tinker who went about in these parts last fall."

"Well," said Amos, spelling out the bill as if it were news to him, "I have a mind to try and find the child, that I have."

"So would any of us, I expect," said the woman.

"But bless you, if the tramps have got her, they've tramped off by this time. They won't give her up till they see the reward—a thumping big sum surely. They are most likely half-way across the country now towards Ipswich."

Amos ate his bread and cheese with a pocket-knife, drank a draught of water, and saying he was glad to see the old gentleman so brisk, walked off again.

"He is looking for the child, as sure as my name

is Betsy Long," said the woman. "Well, I wish he may find her, for it's heartbreaking to think of the poor little innocent along with them bad folks, that it is."

Amos doubled, and turned sharp to the right when he left the village, then to the left. Wherever he saw a dip in the heath or wide-stretching moorland, he made for it; but only to be disappointed again and again.

The red sun was sinking in the west on the evening of the second day, and Amos had walked round and round within a circuit of some eight or ten miles of Colne, when he suddenly stood still. There, far away but distinctly visible, he saw, rising against the clear primrose-coloured sky, a thin spiral line of blue smoke. Amos made for it, and soon came upon a sandy ridge, thick with gorse bushes, called in those Eastern counties "fuz." The bushes skirted a hollow place, just one of those which are favourite haunts of gipsies and tramps. Amos threw himself on his face and crept cautiously near the edge of the little valley. He saw in the clear pale light of sunset the van with its small chimney, but no one was moving. He slipped down the sandy incline, getting many pricks and scratches by the way, and, fearing to arouse suspicion, raised himself very cautiously on his feet, and by so doing he could look in at one of the small windows of the van. A bright little fire was burning, and before it sat an old woman, a boy, and a little child.

Amos's heart gave a great throb of mingled hope and fear. The child was poorly clad; no long golden hair flowed over its shoulders. *That* could not be the little lady!

Amos crept round to the front, and determined to satisfy himself as to the child by nearer observation. Looking round to assure himself that no one was lying in ambush, he ascended the steps of the van and tapped at the door. It was opened by the boy.

"Beg your pardon," he said, "but can you tell me how far I am from the village of Colne?"

The boy shook his head, and the old woman called from her corner by the fire, "A matter of eight miles."

"That's a good step," Amos said, peering past the boy, who stood guarding the entrance.

"Is your little maid ill?" he asked. For poor Bunchie was sitting on a wooden stool with her head on the old crone's lap!

"No, she ain't ill that I know of, thank you," was the answer.

Amos had read the papers carefully, and he remembered the words.

"Answers to the pet name of Bunchie." He advanced a little farther into the van and said—

"Bunchie!"

In a moment the child sprang up.

"I'll take you home, my dear Miss Bunchie!"
Then turning to the old woman he said—

"Look you here, missis. This child is to come along with me. She is stolen property, that's how it is, and I am a going to restore it."

The old woman rocked herself to and fro and said—
"I've no wish to keep her, but it will be the worse
for me when they come home."

Bunchie meantime sprang to Amos, saying-

"Take me home, take me home!"

The deaf and dumb boy, beginning to understand what was intended, set his back against the door, and signed and threatened with his fist. But Amos, snatching up an old rug to cover the poorly clothed child, laid her across his shoulder, and bade her cling to his neck. Then with his one strong arm he thrust the boy aside, and was out 'in the frosty evening with his treasure safe clasped to his breast before the boy could recover himself. Up the sandy incline went Amos whispering—

"You are safe, Miss Bunchie. I'm taking of you to Barrow Court. Be still, my pretty! you are safe."

When they got out on the open heath, Amos strode on at an immensely quick pace.

A donkey-cart with one figure in it, and another walking at the side, passed them at some little dis-

stance. The tramps were all unconscious that their prey had escaped them.

Amos had his wits about him, and pausing at the constable's house at Colne, he found a policeman in plain clothes there. Amos lifted the old rug from Bunchie's face, and told the story in a few words of his successful search for the lost child.

Little Bunchie had fallen asleep on Amos's breast, and a smile was on her rosy lips as of one secure from trouble and going home.

Amos jerked his head in the direction of the heath.

"You had better be on their track," he said.

"They have stolen all her clothes, and they ought to be come down upon, the vagabonds! There's a queer boy who is silly, I think, and an old crone, and, as I believe, there's more of the gang. You'll catch'em up if you make haste."

The policeman stretched out his legs before the fire and said, "All right!" but as Amos tramped away with his long strides he said to himself—

"It ain't more haste less speed in his case. So much the worse! I'd like to give them vagabonds a good thrashing, that I would."

CHAPTER XXXV.

RESTORED.

LITTLE BUNCHIE had been missed on Tuesday, and Friday morning dawned and yet no tidings of her.

Lady Stuart was sick at heart. She had been able to get no sleep, and only forced herself for the sake of others to taste food.

The morning's post brought a number of letters, and amongst them one which made Lady Stuart start from her seat.

"Your father's writing and the Southampton postmark!" she exclaimed.

Sir Montague had come home invalided, and he posted his letter from Southampton, where he had arrived the day before.

Telegrams were very rare in the days of which I write, and the telegraphic system, now so widely spread, was only in its infancy. Instead of writing, therefore, Sir Montague had started homewards, and he said he hoped to arrive by an afternoon train at Norminster Station.

Strange indeed was the mingled feeling of joy and sorrow with which Lady Stuart looked forward to that long-desired meeting. What heavy news she had to tell her husband! If he were broken down with fever, how would he bear it? The children gathered round her full of loving sympathy, for they all guessed what was in her heart.

Hope grew fainter and fainter as days passed on with no tidings of Bunchie, and yet insensibly, perhaps, every one clung to that hope. Till they knew the worst they hoped for the best. But the news of her husband's coming had broken up the hard grief which had seemed to hold the poor stricken mother ice-bound, and she wept long and gently on Rex's shoulder.

Mr. Goodwin, who was continually in and out of Barrow Court, came in for his morning's visit and found the children all excited and expectant.

It was arranged that he should go with Rex in the carriage to the station and meet Sir Montague and break the news to him that there was a vacant place in the home to which he was returning.

How often Lady Stuart had looked forward to this return!—how she had pictured it to herself many times!—Blanche and Berry, her two darlings, lifted in the arms of their tall, noble-looking father. And now there was no little Bunchie to make some quaint little speech of welcome, no golden curls to shine against her father's dark beard, no sweet kisses to be pressed by those rosy lips on his cheek and brow.

"My child! my child!" Lady Stuart cried aloud in the bitterness of her grief. "To know, only to know where she is, that is what I crave for. O children! pray that I may be patient."

The day passed on slowly—it seemed interminable. About six o'clock the carriage came round, and Lady Stuart gave Rex a parting kiss.

"Be careful what you say to your father, dear Rex; remember he has been ill. O Rex! tell him as gently as you can."

"You may trust me, mother," the boy said in a choked voice.

"I do trust you; you are my great comfort, dear Rex."

When the carriage was gone, Lady Stuart went up to her room to be alone. She felt in that agony of suspense, she could bear no earthly voices. She felt —as many of us have felt—it was better to be alone.

As she sat in mute expectation by her window, looking out on the bright winter's night, her eyes fixed on the gates where the carriage would turn in, she heard a tap at the door, gentle and hesitating. When she opened it she saw Regina.

"I came to ask you if you would mind speaking to Agnes; she is so miserable, and she has something to tell you."

"I cannot come now, Regina; I can bear no

greater strain upon me. I wish—I pray to be calm when their father arrives. I am afraid of breaking down; so I have sent even Berry away."

Regina clasped her hands.

"I think," she said, "if you could come to Agnes, it would comfort you."

There was something so beseeching in those dark eyes of Regina's that Lady Stuart could not resist their appeal.

"Agnes is really, really sorry now," she faltered.

"She can't sleep, she eats nothing, and she does so much want you to forgive her."

Lady Stuart stooped and clasped Regina in a loving embrace.

"My dear child, you have always been a peacemaker. Go and tell Agnes to come here to me." And in a few minutes Agnes came into the room.

The last four days had so changed her that Lady Stuart exclaimed—

- "Agnes, are you so ill?"
- "No," said Agnes, "no, but so miserable. I know you will always hate me now—you must hate me."
- "Hush, hush, my child! do not add to my sorrow by talking so wildly."
- "I see it all now," Agnes said in the same low tone. "I have never done anything but deceive all my life. I wanted to be loved and cared for, and this is the end. Mamma, it is all my fault

that Bunchie is lost—dead, perhaps! I sent Sophy for the basket. I drove the others away by saying dreadful things of Regina. I left the darling on the gate. I made Tottie Smith come with me, and made her tell a lie. I think I shall die if Bunchie never comes back-for, O mamma! it is all mv fault! I know you can't forgive me, but I have told you the truth at least—the whole truth. I cheated in the schoolroom, I have often done it. I think if I had always been with you, I should have seen before how wicked it was. I should have seen how God hates falsehood. But Mrs. Smith used to be dreadfully angry with me, never sorry. No one was ever sorry till I came to you. Now, now, I would do anything to show you I love you, and I see that it is sinful to pretend anything; and now it is too late." Agnes's eyes were dry and tearless, her cheeks flushed, her lips parched. "And papa, how he will hate me for all this! Papa, of whom I am so proud! Papa, you must tell him, I can't. I don't want to see him. I am afraid to see him."

Then loving arms were round poor repentant Agnes.

Lady Stuart drew her gently to her side and said—

"Dear Agnes, I love you and forgive you. Let us ask God to forgive you too."

Love you and forgive you! How the words struck deep into poor Agnes's heart. Love and forgiveness! No reproaches—no shrinking from the child who had so grievously offended, who had brought upon the household and upon the loving heart of the mother such grief and sorrow.

The effect on Agnes was such as cannot be told by any words of mine. Harshness and anger, even just reproaches, might have stopped the spring of true penitence, and embittered the girl's spirit, or frozen it into indifference. But love and forgiveness did their work, and the broken heart of the mother was healed by the forgiveness which was extended to her who had wounded it so sorely. her life will Agnes remember this winter evening. There may be much further conflict for her, for hard indeed is the battle which has to be fought against this fault—a harder battle than I can describe to you. Some of you may have fought it, some may have yet to begin to fight. But let none expect to succeed in their own strength, or without a full acknowledgment of the past. Then, as for Agnes Stuart there is hope, the hope which comes from Him who has conquered sin for us, and will conquer it in us if we go to Him with full purpose of heart.

The clock in the hall struck eight, and taking Agnes's hand, Lady Stuart came out of her room and went to the schoolroom.

The children were all there, Berry forgetting his troubles by watching Regina build him a house of cards, which he always blew down or shook down before it had reached the second storey. "Bunchie will never come back," Berry had begun to say, and now as he toddled to meet his mother he repeated the words.

"Bunchie will never come back."

"Hush, Berry!" said Bertha. "Look, here is your Mother-Hubbard book."

But Lady Stuart took Berry in her arms and said— "Let us all go down to the hall to be ready to meet papa."

Hamish rose slowly from his couch, and taking his crutches, prepared to follow. Regina went to him and walked near to steady him.

It had been Hamish's one idea that whenever his father came he should meet him on his feet.

The servants were all gathered in the hall, where a large fire was blazing and the lamps lighted.

"Come close to me, Agnes," Lady Stuart said, for Agnes stood apart pale and trembling. She knew what they all thought of her, and she knew how the sadness in every heart for Bunchie's loss had been caused by her.

At last carriage-wheels were heard and the door was flung open.

Rex came up the steps first, then the tall figure of Sir Montague Stuart. He walked slowly, and evidently with difficulty. Lady Stuart advanced to meet him, and was soon folded in his arms. No word was spoken; the father's return was a silent

one. Lady Stuart raised herself from her husband's arms, and looking up into his face, saw the traces of illness but too plainly, and the traces of distress too.

They all came round him as he sank upon a chair in the hall.

"What! Hamish, my boy, walking? That is grand!" he said

"Bertha, Agnes, little Berry!" Then he covered his face with his hands.

"She may yet be restored to us," Lady Stuart bent down and whispered. "She may yet be found."

It was the first time Lady Stuart had spoken cheerfully; but it was habitual to her to forget herself even in a sorrow like this for the sake of one she loved.

"Speak to Regina, dearest," she said again, "our dear Regina; and these two little girls are the Smiths, Tottie and Mary."

Sir Montague held out his hand, but held Berry fast on his knee.

"Bunchie is lost!" Berry began in a sleepy tone, "poor Bunch!"

And now there was a little stir in the outer porch. Mr. Goodwin's voice was heard, and Lady Stuart said —"We have forgotten Mr. Goodwin, our kind friend; tell him to come in."

But the inner door of the hall was pushed open, and in came the tall familiar figure of Amos Barnes. He went straight up to Lady Stuart, and pulling the rug aside with his teeth which covered something in his arm, he displayed the face of little Bunchie sleeping as quietly and peacefully as in her cot in the nursery; her curls gone, the little ragged brown frock tied round her white neck, her arms bare; but even though so changed, Berry, standing on his father's knee, and looking down upon the child, exclaimed—

"Bunchie! Bunchie! she is come home again to Berry!"

Amos put the child into her mother's arms, and in a few words told the story which we already know. Then he turned away his face, all aglow with joy, waiting for no thanks, expecting no reward, happy and contented beyond all words, merely saying—

"Beg your pardon, ma'am, but I must go'right off and tell the 'little chap' and my missis, for they will be as pleased as they can be that I brought the little lady home."

"Stop, Amos, stop!" said Rex; "do stop!"

But every one's attention was now turned towards Lady Stuart, as Nurse, taking Bunchie from her mother's arms, exclaimed—

"Some water; my Lady has fainted!"

The revulsion of feeling had proved too much for that tender mother's heart, and joy had for the time stopped its great thrill of thankfulness in a long fit of unconsciousness of all that was passing.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VANISHING AWAY.

A YEAR has gone by since that December evening when Bunchie had been restored to her home.

And now, on the anniversary of that day, we will look once more into the schoolroom at Barrow Court before we say good-bye to the child-life which we have followed there in work and play.

A year looks a very long bit of life's journey to the young, but to us, who are far on in that journey, it is but a short space and soon over. It brings with it, however, many changes—sometimes very sad ones, sometimes very pleasant ones, sometimes changes which are so imperceptible that we are hardly conscious of them.

There are changes on the "Sarah Anne," for the "little chap" had gone to school up in the country, and was now at home for a holiday for Christmas. He had long grown out of the blue suit and gilt buttons, and in the fresh, bright little face which looked out from a very thick suit of brown serge, the poor, worn, ragged barge-child of old times could scarcely be recognised.

Tim was preparing for a visit to "the good lady's room" with Sue and a baby with a very red frock and very black eyes, who was gnawing at one of Tim's wooden figures with unmixed delight.

Amos had been scrubbed and washed till his face shone like a full moon, and if he was doubtful about the bright orange tie with white spots his wife wound round his neck under a stiff collar, he did not hurt her feelings by saying so.

"The missis does love a bit of bright colour, and she must have her way," he said.

Sue herself was resplendent in a blue merino gown, and large gilt brooch, and plaid shawl, with as many colours in it as could well be got into a shawl; she wore a large straw bonnet with a big bow and strings to match the gown. They were all to be at the "lady's room" at four, and not only Amos Barnes, wife and baby, and the "little chap," but other inhabitants of other barges were invited.

All day the children at Barrow Court had been busy with their preparations, and there was a redundance of decoration and a great quantity of tea and cake. All the party were assembled by four o'clock, for barge-folk like an early tea; and when every one had eaten more cake than some people could have believed possible—the children waiting on them—there was music and singing and a magic lantern, and then a great quantity of oranges and

nuts, and then Lady Stuart went to her place at the top of the room, where she always sat on Sundays, and said she wished to speak to them all a very few words. Instantly the talking and laughing ceased, and every one settled in wrapt attention.

Lady Stuart began by saying how glad she was to have them there to keep the anniversary of a day which she must ever remember with thankfulness—the day of Sir Montague's return from India, and the day of her lost child's restoration to her. "There is one person here," she said, "to whom, with God's blessing, I owe that precious child's restoration. I need scarcely name him. You all know him—Amos Barnes. You know how noble and kind he has been to the orphan child of Luke Jones; but many of you do not know that the reward offered for my darling's recovery was refused by Amos—he would not accept it." Here murmurs were heard from the bottom of the long table.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am, my Lady. I didn't want it—'twas you who ought to have the reward, for all you did for my little chap."

Laughter followed this speech of Amos's, and Lady Stuart went on—

"He would not accept the reward. So I wish him to know that Sir Montague has taken care of it for some rainy day, when he may want it, and that till then it will lie in the Bank for him, as my gratitude lies in my heart, gathering interest as time rolls on, and growing larger and larger year by year."

How happy every one felt, for Amos and Sue had so won their way by their example, and by their readiness to help their neighbours in every difficulty, that the jealousies had died out amongst the better class of the barge-folk, and there was a hearty cheer in acknowledgment of Lady Stuart's words. Then they all sang a hymn, Sue's voice sounding high above the rest, and then they all separated.

You must not think the old chest in the attic was forgotten. Once more the old brocade was brought out from its folded slumber, and once more the gold-headed cane felt itself a person of importance on whom the world leaned!

The tableaux were all arranged as they had been planned the year before, and the "wonderful Smiths" were again invited to take a part in them. Friends and neighbours met in Barrow Court on New Year's Eve, and neatly-written programmes were handed to each guest on their arrival.

It was an early party, for children like the bargefolk are the better for early hours. Tea was served in the dining-room, and Miss Baker was present in a little check silk dress and pink cap, and M. de Vallerie in a very tight frock-coat and very white wristbands, and a lady who had lately taught the children music, and Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin, and Ada.

I said there were often changes so imperceptible

that they were scarcely noticed, but those who had eyes to see might have detected a difference in several of the children who were preparing for the "pictures" as Bunchie called them. She liked the word better than "tableaux."

Agnes was no longer always anxious to be first; there was an evident desire to please others, and the old self-sufficient air and bearing had almost disappeared, and the pretty blue eyes had in them a more direct and honest expression.

Regina had grown very much, and was, as Nurse expressed it, "so much wider awake" than she used to be. Regina had exchanged her day-dreams for realities, and had learned to keep the imaginative gift God had given her in its proper place.

Bertha and Rex were the least changed, but Hamish, cheerfully limping about on his crutches, could hardly be recognised.

"Why, my boy," Sir Montague said, "you are as brisk as any of them; don't overdo it."

"Oh, I am all right, father," was the bright answer. "I am the better for moving about."

If there was a cloud over that happy evening, it was the thought that after the holidays Sir Montague had determined that Rex must go to Rugby, and that perhaps Regina would return to the Bankhouse in the spring. A second winter abroad had done so much for Mr. Turnbull that he

looked forward hopefully to living in England once more.

"We will not meet trouble half-way," Rex said that morning when Regina and he had been privately rehearsing their parts; "but I wish we could go on as we are always with Mr. Goodwin, you and I especially."

"Yes," Regina said, "I can't bear to think that there will be no more preparations together; but we won't talk of it now, and of course boys must go to school."

"Of course they must," said Rex decidedly, "unless they wish to be noodles all their days."

"As if you could ever be a noodle!" said Regina.
"I expect every boy at Rugby will be behind you in swimming and running."

You have all seen tableaux I daresay, and descriptions of these things are apt to be dull. Still, I think few of you have ever looked at a more charming Little Bo-Peep than Bunchie made, nor a more determined Little Boy Blue, with his cheeks puffed out as he seemed to blow his horn—a character which suited Berry exactly. Then there were several very good historical scenes—Agnes as Lady Jane Grey refusing the crown, and Bertha as Queen Elizabeth receiving a copy of the Bible when she made her first royal progress through London. For this Berry and Bunchie were dressed

up, and the Smiths and some others to represent the crowd. Then there was Queen Margaret and Prince Edward and the robber; and lastly, as the great finale, there were Rex and Regina as King Henry V. and his French Queen Katherine, as described in Shakespeare's play of "Henry V."

This was the great success of the evening, and the old gold brocade shone in all its glory, and the doves glistened in the light, and Rex and Regina had to appear again and again, before the audience was satisfied.

At last the curtain fell, and the pictures were hidden from sight.

And here, too, I must leave the children behind that curtain in their quaint garments of a time gone by. I can follow them no farther now on their life's journey. I know full well that that journey must have its lights and shadows, and its rough as well as smooth places. I know that noble-hearted Rex will not always find his crusade against all that is mean and ignoble easy. I know that in his school-life he will have to bear much and learn much; but the cross of the Lord is the banner under which he will march as boy and man, and I am not afraid for Rex.

Regina too, as she vanishes from my sight behind that curtain, and the voices of the children grow faint and fainter, I think of with love and sympathy. For I know that Regina's sensitive heart must needs suffer many pains, and that those dark eyes of hers which looked out so wistfully from the quaint head-dress with its edge of pearls and its long spangled veil, must be often dimmed with tears. Regina is not one who will pass through life without deep griefs as well as deep joys; but, like the river of which she wrote in her childish story, I think that Regina will bring gladness and refreshment to many as she passes on to the great ocean of rest.

Child-life is so beautiful when rightly understood, and if here in this picture of it I have dashed it with some dark shadows, I leave it now in the bright shining of the light which comes straight down to faithful hearts from the very Source and Fountain of all light.

So soon the children pass away, so soon they fade from before us, and men and women stand where the boys and girls stood, it seems to us but a very little time ago. But there are ever others springing up to fill the old places, and child-life remains, its fairest jewel truth, its best garment modesty, its atmosphere the joy of a pure heart, which the Lord has taken as His own, and blessed with the sweetness of His presence here, and His infinite love here and hereafter.

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